Dangerous Deeds

Boy Scouts of America
Troop 52

Date Due. Name

Kenneth Wolfgang
1212 Rosewold Ave.

Lawrence went through the secret manoeuvers but there was no response and he found his anxiety growing.

AVIATOR SERIES VOLUME 3

DANGEROUS DEEDS

OR

THE FLIGHT IN THE DIRIGIBLE

BY

CAPTAIN FRANK COBB

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AVIATOR SERIES

1 BATTLING THE CLOUDS,
Or, For a Comrade's Honor

2 AN AVIATOR'S LUCK,
Or, The Camp Knox Plot

3 DANGEROUS DEEDS,
Or, The Flight in the Dirigible

Made in U. S. A.

DANGEROUS DEEDS

CHAPTER I

A HEAVY fog pressed down upon the city of Washington. To the boy watching it from the vantage point of the window in the top floor of the apartment in which he stood, it spread as mysterious and as sodden as a flood, enveloping streets, parks, houses, indeed all but the tops of the highest structures, the domes and roofs of public buildings and spires of churches, and here and there a dark, drowned mass of foliage.

The apartment stood on a height and as the boy looked he saw a glow in the east, followed quickly by thin banners of red and orange. Then the sun rose and turned the domes and spires swimming on the sea of mist into fairy flotillas wrought of pearl and gold.

Just as a churned and angry tide swirls into some still cove and seems to melt and dissolve into transparency, the opaque fog slowly vanished. Buildings and statues seemed to lift themselves out of it and finally, broad and placid in the desertion of dawn, the streets themselves appeared, winding here and there in the wonderful curves designed by

the master-mind which make Washington one of the beauty spots of the world.

Because he had looked down on most of the cities of the world, because, young as he was, he had seen thrilling sky views of towers and spires and mosques and temples lifting under many skies, the boy stood looking at the beautiful Capitol of his native land with a swelling heart.

Suddenly from somewhere, everywhere, nowhere came a faint, peculiar humming. Louder and louder it grew. The boy flung open the window and, leaning far out, scanned the cloudless sky with practiced gaze. Far away in the west appeared a thing of wings and sound flying far above those other birds, the troubled buzzards, that dipped and swayed and hung so easily in the invisible tides of the air.

As the boy watched, another and still another airplane appeared, close in the wake of the first, until eleven of them, all light biplanes, dashed headlong across the sky. Then, their pace slackening somewhat, they formed in twos and again strung out to compose the wide V of migrating geese.

The eleventh plane detached itself from the others which now swung wide and swept around in a graceful circle, while the single one, an instruction plane, commanded the manoeuvers by means of wireless telegraphy. Twice the ten planes circled. Then the leader, turning sharply, led the others in the direction of Mount Vernon until they

vanished. The single plane, lazy as the buzzards below, hung almost motionless, waiting, effortless and serene, until once more with a faint hum the planes returned, lined up and hung at attention for a moment, when the instruction plane turned and in a wild rush of speed led its charges away in the direction whence they had come.

Not until distance had stilled the final hum of the last motor did the boy realize that he was clinging precariously to the hard granite facing outside the window, while leaning far out, too far out for safety even for a young aviator who felt no dread of falling.

"A great bunch of students," he reflected, withdrawing and turning to look at the room in which he stood. It was the usual "beautifully furnished bachelor apartment" of commerce. Wall paper dark, in order not to show soil, odds and ends of well-worn, not to say shabby mission furniture, a table, chairs, a desk with a soiled blotter firmly skewered down on its flat top, a crex rug. Beyond was a small bedroom, and out of that any sleuth of a de-tec-a-tive would have guessed there was a bathroom if he had taken time to listen to the mournful drip, drip of a leaky faucet.

Lawrence Petit looked the bare, unpretentious, unhomelike room over with a smile. He had never been so "well fixed," as he said, but he did not approve. Like everything else, the apartment was an incident, a stepping-stone to something better.

He went to his suitcase and took out a pocket portfolio and with a look of distaste at the soiled blotter, sat down at the table, tried his fountain pen and commenced to write. And while he is busy, we will glance at the past of the young aviator.

His own beginning he did not know. His first remembrance was of a sordid, poverty-stricken cabin where, with a group of other children, he played and quarrelled and starved, and where a slatternly woman gloomed or passed from one screaming rage into another until quieted by a black bottle brought her by an evil looking, leering man at whose approach all the children scattered and hid themselves. The children, when they spoke to the woman at all, called her Moll. Lawrence could not remember a time when the question of his parentage had occurred to him. At this period of his life he was little more than a healthy little animal, content to sleep and play and fight for the scanty food he was given, and, that failing, to steal from the more fortunate neighbors.

In the woodshed, back of the shanty, a lean-to scarcely worse than the house itself, stood a broken-down bureau crammed with odds and ends of rags and clothing too unspeakable for use. In this one day, while Moll was digging through its confusion, she chanced on a worn, black shopping bag. She tossed it to Lawrence, known wholly at that time as Snooks.

"That's yourn," she said. "You keep a-hold of that and don't let those kids git it." Then on second thought she snatched it away from the child and hung it on a rafter far out of his reach. For a little it tantalized him, then it was forgotten until a memorable morning when the welfare worker appeared with a couple of officers, a patrol wagon and an ambulance. Into the ambulance Moll was hurried, to the children's amazement. They had failed to distinguish the ravings of fever from the outcries attending the frequent visitation of the black bottle. The dark man had disappeared.

As the welfare worker rounded the reluctant children into the patrol wagon, Snooks ran back and with a long stick knocked down the handbag.

"What's that?" asked the welfare lady.

"It's mine," said Snooks in his hoarse, unchildish voice. "Moll she give it to me and said to keep it because it's mine."

The welfare worker scented one of the strange clues that often lie hidden for so long before they appear to clear up a mystery, but the bag, a very shabby, cheap affair, held nothing but a small photograph wrapped up in a piece of newspaper, and on another piece that had evidently been about some small change as the shape of the money still marked the scrap, was the name Lawrence, written over and over as though to try a pen point.

Snooks was put in a home and once more the bag passed out of his possession into the keeping

of the authorities who had him in charge. A name was needed, and Snooks was asked to find one for himself, a feat he was incapable of doing. So one of the teachers, remembering the scrap of paper, called him Lawrence and added Petit as the child was so very small.

So Snooks, dirty, unkempt and blankly ignorant, became Lawrence Petit, a ward of the city of Louisville.

Bathed, clipped, and neatly clad, the boy changed almost at once. He seemed possessed by an overpowering ambition. He learned rapidly,— so rapidly that he forged ahead of all his classmates. Lectures on health and strength that bored the other children held him spellbound. He became quick and wiry as a cat, with lean limbs and perfectly trained muscles. As time passed, he heard stories of homes and of mothers and fathers that filled him with sick longing, but finally he accepted his fate and as he grew older made up his mind that he must remain Lawrence Petit, with no people, no home, no age, no past; just a nameless waif in an orphanage.

Two great passions consumed the boy. He was bound to fly; he was bound to succeed in life.

If any of us want a thing badly enough and long enough, we always find that we are given a chance to get it. There was a young teacher in the Home who spent much time with Lawrence and made it possible for him to read everything that was writ-

ten about airplanes and balloons and all sorts of aircraft. When an aircraft factory was started in Louisville to supply the growing demands for private machines, this teacher secured employment for Lawrence, and soon he was dismissed from the Home as perfectly able to care for himself. With him went the shabby bag; and now for the first time the boy took time to look at its contents. He had had no desire to do so before. He looked long at the scrap with the name Lawrence scrawled over it, and the other scrap around the photograph he read carefully, but evidently it had been torn from the advertising page of a newspaper and had to do with "Help Wanted, Female."

The picture was that of a most beautiful young woman. Perfect features and masses of glorious hair made the face seem almost unreal, but its chief charm was the look of happiness that filled it.

"Who can she be?" the boy Lawrence asked himself. She did not seem over fifteen or sixteen years of age. Lawrence put the bag and its contents back in his trunk but could not forget the lovely, laughing face. He buckled down to work with a new ambition. Past he had none. He determined to make for himself a future that he could be proud of. And because he had no one, actually no one in the whole world to call his own, he adopted the picture for his "folks." He never named her sister or mother; he just worked for her and looked at her when the way seemed hard.

As time passed he developed a perfectly amazing sense of balance and direction, coupled with more common sense than falls to the lot of most, and one day he left the factory and went out to the nearest aviation field as assistant mechanician. From this he rose by bounds until he was accounted the best airman on the field. After he found that most of his time was to be spent far above the earth, he commenced to worry about the picture. What if his things should be burned up? What if the picture should be stolen? So, cutting a piece of cardboard the exact size, he went down and bought a leather pocket case in which he placed the picture, and always after that he wore it buttoned securely in his pocket. He felt better then; his "folks" were with him. Back of the picture he placed the two scraps of paper, and with this frail safeguard spread his wings and took flight courageously toward the goal he had set for himself.

Five years had passed since the signing of the Armistice and many of the wounds of that unforgettable war had healed. Many things had happened, both in America and abroad.

Aircraft had changed both in nature and construction. Mufflers were in widespread use, indeed were required by law, and now the wing-filled sky did not rattle and reverberate with the roar of engines unless on special class or instruction work. Traffic machines went with silent, steady directness along their uncharted courses, while dainty

troops of pleasure craft flitted everywhere, their brightly painted wings and hulls glistening in the sun.

To Lawrence Petit the upper air seemed his home. He remained on the earth only so long as it was positively necessary; and now, writing busily on his tablet, he felt that he was on the eve of an adventure which promised to carry him higher and farther than any which he had yet attempted. He referred to the letter before him. It was long and typewritten on handsome paper. Hamilton Ridgeway, the writer, was one of the greatest powers in the United States. It was in obedience to his summons that Lawrence had come to Washington and was now waiting impatiently for the hour of his interview with the great man.

Young as he was, Lawrence had learned to respect that powerful personality who numbered the kings and princes of the earth as his friends, who handled millions as other men handle pennies, who always stood ready to finance any great national undertaking, yet who was so simple and kindly that he never failed to send back a cheery hello to the newsie who happened to know and speak his name. Hamilton Ridgeway had been told of the remarkable feats of the young aviator, and with his shrewd ability to pick men he was about to interview the boy to see of what material he was really made.

It was an ordeal that would have made most boys so nervous that they would have appeared ill at

ease, but Lawrence, as he noted that it was almost time to start for his appointment, calmly put up his writing, brushed his hair, glanced at his wrist watch, and seeing that he still had five minutes to spare, sat down by the window and opened the pocket case. Long and tenderly he gazed at the pictured face.

"I will do the very best I know, just for you," he said, smiling back at it. "I don't suppose I will ever know who you are, but we belong to each other somehow, don't we? And I am going to make good just so I can always like to look at you. Gee, you are sweet! You must be old enough to be my mother because you have looked just like you do now ever since I first saw you back there at Moll's. Too bad she died! I always thought she could have told me something about you, you Pretty, but I reckon I will never get to know any more of you than I do now."

He shook his head sadly. "You are so pretty," he murmured. "A fellow would do anything for a mother like you; live clean and keep straight, and work his head off besides, to make you proud of him. Tell you what I will do, Pretty. I am going to make believe that you are waiting for me somewhere, and I have got to make good before we meet. How's that? A bargain?" he smiled back at the smiling pictured eyes and, placing the case carefully in his pocket, put on his hat and overcoat and started off to meet Mr. Ridgeway.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE later, sitting in the plain but convenient office opposite the great man he had come to see, Lawrence was impressed by the power and force in the steady eyes that looked so straight into his own, and in the kind mouth and forceful broad brow saw a promise of clean dealing and deep wisdom.

"I cannot get over my surprise at your youth," said Mr. Ridgeway. "It seems a foolish procedure to give such a great enterprise into the hands of a boy like you. Are you sure," he added, laughing, "that you have not a father or brother to whom I should be talking?"

"No, sir; I am the one you sent for," replied Lawrence. "I have been fooling with airplanes and balloons ever since I graduated from kites."

"How old are you?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"I don't know, sir," said Lawrence, a flush mounting to his brow. "I am a waif. I do not know my own name, or my age. I was taken from one of the worst parts of the city to the Home where I was partly brought up. I have no hope of ever finding anyone belonging to me."

"Have you no clues?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"I fear not, sir," he replied. "At least they are

too slight to be considered. I speak of this because I think you ought to know that whatever becomes of me, there is no one to rejoice and no one to grieve."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Ridgeway simply. "Yet for my purpose, that simplifies everything. You will embark on a desperate enterprise if you attempt what I have in mind for you to do. And I cannot tell you, indeed I cannot guess the outcome. It depends largely on your own daring, caution and ability. Your youth is your best safeguard because no one would ever believe you to be embarked on anything like this."

"I am willing to take the risks," said Lawrence simply.

"Then you may try it," decided the great man. "I believe there were two other men coming to see me this morning on this same errand. Step into my private office until I see them. Perhaps one or both will do to work in as mechanicians."

Still in the dark as to what Mr. Ridgeway wanted him to undertake, Lawrence was about to go into the other room when a clerk rapped on the outer door and entered without waiting for a summons.

His face was pale, and his eyes rolled wildly.

"M-m-m-ister Ridgeway, sir," he stuttered, "those two gentlemen who were waiting outside for you, they are both asleep."

"Both *what?*" asked Mr. Ridgeway sharply.

"Both asleep, and we can't wake either of them."

"Drugged!" exclaimed Mr. Ridgeway, glancing at Lawrence. "Come on, you may as well see this thing out before you decide to cast your fortune in such dangerous places." He rushed to the door, followed by Lawrence and the agitated clerk.

On a broad settee in the waiting-room two men were sprawled. Mr. Ridgeway took one keen glance at their pallid faces and half closed lids, between which their pupils, contracted to pin points, glared strangely.

"Drugged!" he said again. Then stepping to the telephone, he called the office of the great building and asked sharply, "Office, is the house doctor there? Ask him to come to Mr. Ridgeway's office, nineteenth floor, immediately."

He returned to the settee, where the men still sprawled. "Lay them flat on the floor," he ordered.

Scarcely had this been done when the doctor, a small, keen young man, entered with a little bag in his hand. His sharp eyes swept the group and he nodded to Mr. Ridgeway as he hastened to the two men on the floor and dropped on one knee beside them.

"Drugged," he said, glancing up.

"I thought so," said Mr. Ridgeway. "They couldn't get enough whiskey in as dry a land as this is now to affect them like this. Besides, their pupils; do you see them?"

"Contracted to nothing," said Doctor Lansing.

He prepared a hypodermic needle and made an injection in each left forearm.

"If there is no response of the heart action after fifteen minutes," he said, "I will know that they are suffering from one of the three newly discovered anesthetics which are so deadly in the hands of a criminal."

"Don't you think we had better get them to the hospital at once?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"Not until the fifteen minutes pass," said the doctor. "If the needle takes effect, they will be all right in an hour or two; at least they could be taken home, but if it is the other, we will have a long tussle with them."

"Well, this settles one thing," said Mr. Ridgeway decidedly. "We have had every office building in this and every other large city supplied with house physicians for the last three years, but another law must be made requiring every building over a certain size to equip a hospital room for first-aid."

"It would be a great thing," said Doctor Lansing, his keen eyes on his two patients, "both for the patients and the doctors. I have had to send many a sufferer home or to the hospital when some slight surgical or electrical care would have finished the matter within a short time, and with a great deal less suffering." He took out his stethoscope, listened to each heart, and rose. "Well, Mr. Ridgeway, these men are suffering from administration,

by themselves or others, of one of the new poisons. Do you know who they are?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ridgeway. "I can tell you about them, but first get them to the hospital." He called for an ambulance, and as soon as he had seen the unconscious victims of an unknown villain's dastard hand carried away, he turned and beckoned Lawrence to follow him into his private office. Sinking down in his chair, he passed a hand through the thick masses of grey hair and sighed.

"There you have it, Lawrence," he said.

"I don't believe I understand," replied Lawrence.

"Sit down then," said Mr. Ridgeway, "and I will explain."

"In the first place," he commenced, "young as you are, you must have felt the dangerous mood the whole world is in. Of course the adjustment after a world war necessarily takes several generations. But to us who happen to be on hand during that adjustment comes the task of hurrying the thing along as much as we possibly can. For this comes the need for absolutely safe transportation of papers, messages and money. Often, too, there is the need for the transportation of millions of dollars' worth of jewels — jewels enough to ransom whole principalities, let alone a king or two.

"We have worked this thing out with the greatest difficulty, trying one method after another, sending our papers in disguised packages, with

trusted messengers, and using the most intricate codes. But all the time there are leaks. For instance, a short time ago a message to the King of Morania, sent under a triplicate code, that is, a code that must be translated three times, was intercepted and only the fact that it was a false message sent to try out a new system kept us from the brink of a fresh war.

"These things are only known to the inner circles, you understand. It would not do to frighten and agitate the public with intimate affairs of state. But we absolutely *must* find a means of transportation that is as free from danger, free from spies and thieves, as it is possible to invent.

"As a last resort, we are going to make use of the dirigible. This of course is where you come in.

"In my private business I have used planes, hydroplanes and one or two dirigibles and as they are well known to be used exclusively for passenger and freight service, they have never been interfered with in any way. I am not known to be working with the government, and my one hope was that we could take the new dirigible that has just been completed for me and make use of it for the transportation of these priceless documents that mean so much to the peace of the world.

"What has happened this morning troubles me more than I can tell you. Someone suspects us, or else those two men are the victims of a private enemy."

The telephone bell jingled. Mr. Ridgeway lifted the receiver and adjusted the delicate needle point on the desk pad by means of which all telephone conversations were recorded, a new invention which Lawrence had heard of but had not seen. Mr. Ridgeway listened with a frown darkening his brow.

"I will be right out," he said finally, and replaced the receiver.

"Well, the new dirigible was wrecked in the night," he said. "That looks like business! Come on; we will go out and look the ground over. That is, if you care to cast your lot with such a dangerous game."

"Of course," said Lawrence simply. "I shall enjoy it."

"Good!" said Mr. Ridgeway. "We will draw up the necessary papers this afternoon. I want you on your past record as an airman, and your youth is a good safeguard to you. Also you are not afraid. Your duties will be whatever the moment calls for. You may have to drive the car, you may be simply a passenger, a messenger, or a boy idling around the hangars. I want you to be ears and eyes and hands and brain for me. Rather a large order? Well, you will be paid well for it." He paused and then named a sum that made Lawrence catch his breath, so large was it.

"All our transactions are confidential," he said.

Entering a small but perfect roadster, Mr. Ridge-

way drove rapidly out of the city to the aviation field, where he found a group of excited men around the new dirigible.

Well guarded as the place evidently was, someone had entered in the night and completely destroyed the delicate machinery. The propellers too were unscrewed, and the blades hacked.

Lawrence was shocked, and the men around were furious. It rather reflected on their care when such an outrage could occur inside of an area where watchmen were supposed to patrol incessantly. Mr. Ridgeway, however, showed no signs of anger. He ordered an investigation and told the head mechanician to see what could be done with the wreck. Then, pleasant as ever, he drove back to the city. "I am certainly glad that happened," he said as they left the field behind.

"Glad?" said Lawrence in astonishment. "Glad? Why, it seems *terrible* to me!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Ridgeway. "The point is this. Now we know that we are suspected. We know that this spying is a serious matter. The knowledge arms us. As for the dirigible—" he paused, and to Lawrence's amazement laughed a merry, whole-souled laugh as though the loss of a machine worth many thousands of dollars was a matter of no consequence at all.

"Being my right hand man, Lawrence, I will tell you a secret," he said after a moment. "That dirigible was not as new as it looked. It was an as-

sembled machine, made up of about a dozen old ones that had been picked up here and there. I took good care, however, that all the papers held long accounts of the wonderful new machine that was being built for Hamilton Ridgeway, and as I own a lot of the papers, I assure you the accounts were glowing. Well, whoever tackled that bunch of junk in the night was unable to use more than a small glow from a pocket flash, so, as all the brass work was carefully polished and every part looked spick and span, there was no way for even a tried machinist to tell that the dirigible was not just what had been so widely advertised and photographed: Hamilton Ridgeway's new dirigible for passenger service and light commercial enterprises." He laughed again.

Then as though from force of habit he looked over his shoulder.

"I declare, the only place I like to talk confidences is in a ten acre lot," he said, "but there is no place for anyone to hang on behind here." He leaned toward Lawrence. "The new machine, safe and sound last night at least, is back on the sand hills in New Jersey, south of Barnegat. Two fishing launches are there in the inlet, but under the tarpaulins are small but effective machine guns. The fishermen fooling around in them are *not* as peaceful as they look. They are secret service men. In a hut back on the rise of ground to the west three other fishermen are smoking and lounging.

They too have badges under their smocks. So we fooled 'em this time anyway," laughed the great man.

Lawrence was silent. He felt the thrill of the old knight when he went galloping forth in quest of a dragon. This monster, threatening his country, was as dangerous and mysterious a dragon as any of the two- or ten-headed monsters that sent the fighting men of a long past age scouring over the downs and moors of merry old England.

Being younger, he was not so much inclined to laugh as Mr. Ridgeway. He wondered where the leak was that made it so easy for the dragon to approach.

Parking the car, they went to luncheon and then returned to Mr. Ridgeway's office, where they found a thick-set man pacing the floor of the waiting-room and showing a good many signs of impatience. As they entered he walked quickly over to Mr. Ridgeway and said in a quick tone, " I tried to beat you in from the field, Mr. Ridgeway, but of course we busted a tire and had to stop, and then your man told me he thought you had gone to lunch, so I just stuck around."

He looked curiously at Lawrence, and Mr. Ridgeway said,

" Come into my office, O'Brien. You may tell me anything you have to say before this young man. He is in my employ now."

" Sort of a young kid for our work, isn't he, Mr.

Ridgeway?" asked O'Brien, smiling a wide, mirthful Irish smile at Lawrence.

"Pretty young," admitted Mr. Ridgeway, "but I don't think it will hurt him."

"It is something he is sure to get over, give him time," said the Irishman whimsically. Then as the heavy door closed, "Well, Mr. Ridgeway, I am the bearer of news. The watchman that has the beat from two until four was sick last night and I took his place, swearing him to silence about the change. He went to bed in my room, and I went out on the beat. At about three I sneaked close to the hangar and thought I could hear something making a sort of scratchin' noise inside. I had a auger hole all fixed a good while ago, and I peeked."

CHAPTER III

"WELL, what did you see?" demanded Mr. Ridgeway as the man paused.

But he did not answer. He had been leaning on the edge of the massive table that Mr. Ridgeway used as a desk, and his fingers were feeling under the edge of the mahogany top. Suddenly he sank to his knees, and peered under the edge. Then he beckoned Mr. Ridgeway and Lawrence. Totally at a loss to imagine what O'Brien was doing, they too sank to their knees and looked under the table.

After a glance Mr. Ridgeway sprang to his feet and stared at O'Brien, who delivered a huge wink in the direction of the table. Then he started in as though he had only stopped talking long enough to clear his throat.

"Well, I peeked," he said, "and there was a feller mauling that dirigible around and hacking at the propellers. I knew him at a glance; he was a dude I had discharged last week; wasn't no good so I let him go, an' he wanted to get even, so he done it by destroyin' that machine. Of course I didn't see his face, but I know the looks of his back," added O'Brien, again winking at the table.

Mr. Ridgeway played up gallantly.

"I am glad you found out who it was, O'Brien. Will you swear out a warrant? I am sorry about the dirigible, but I can get along without it for awhile. I am going out to the Golf Club now. Can I give either of you a lift?"

It seemed to Lawrence as though the two men were acting a part. He wondered if by any chance O'Brien had discovered one of the wonderful listening machines under the edge of the table. If that was so, their enemy must be close to them. He kept still, and let the others talk.

"No, sir; I am going right over to the police station and tell 'em what I know," said O'Brien.

"I will have to go down to the Union Station and see about having my trunk sent up," said Lawrence.

O'Brien nodded, as though pleased with the boy's quickness of perception.

The three walked out, Mr. Ridgeway slamming the door sharply after him. Then instead of turning to the elevator, he started toward the back of the corridor, and reaching a small door inserted a key and opened it on a narrow, winding stairway walled into the building. It was nothing more than a perpendicular tunnel, with a narrow staircase winding through it. Leading O'Brien and Lawrence into this dimly lighted burrow, Mr. Ridgeway, with a sharp glance down the corridor, closed the door, locked it, and motioned O'Brien, who was ahead, to ascend the stairs. He went swiftly, the others close at his heels. Up and up

he went, in obedience to a whispered word from Mr. Ridgeway, until a ground glass skylight marked the end of the stairway.

"Open!" whispered Mr. Ridgeway, and with a heave of his broad shoulder O'Brien pushed the skylight up and the three emerged on the pebbled roof of the building. Replacing the skylight, O'Brien looked at his superior for further orders.

"Well," said Mr. Ridgeway, "I told you this morning, Lawrence, that I never liked to talk unless I was in the middle of a ten-acre lot. So they are listening, are they, O'Brien? Well, we are safe here, I should think. For this time, anyway. Let us get away from these chimneys."

They walked out into the center of the great space that indicated the size of the building, and O'Brien, picking up a pebble and tossing it as he spoke, said:

"Well, sir, it looks as though there was more in the wind than we have been bargaining for. At all events, they have shown us their hand. It is not a coincidence that so many things have happened to hamper us, and the destruction in the shops and around the hangars that has appeared merely slovenly, sinful waste, has been the work of these same dirty miscreants. You are spotted, sir, sure as sure! Known to be working with the government, and instrumental in passing messages and what not along to wherever they ought to go. What are you going to do about it? If you will

excuse me for saying it, sir, I think you ought to duck."

"Duck? Duck where?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"Anywhere you like, say South America, or Alaska, or there's good shooting up at Hudson Bay or was when I was in the Mounted Police of Canada."

"Why should I duck?" demanded Mr. Ridgeway.

"Why, sir, they have you spotted, and you are too valuable a man to this country to take any chances. Suppose they send you West?"

"Kill me, you mean?" asked Mr. Ridgeway. "Well, O'Brien, thank you, but of course you know that I will stay and take my chance. If they have me spotted as you say, why, they will spend a good deal of time watching me, and that will leave the field clear for you and Lawrence. I will have to depend on you for a good deal. For one thing, I think we had better stage a small scrap, when we go downstairs, and I will discharge Lawrence, and will order you somewhere out of range. Then we will not meet without the greatest precautions. Where are you living, O'Brien?"

"I have a room and bath over in the southeast part of the city," answered O'Brien.

"And you, Lawrence?"

"Up on the heights, sir. I like to be high."

"I wish you were closer together," mused Mr. Ridgeway.

"There are twin beds in my bedroom," said

Lawrence. "I wish you would come over there if you feel like it, Mr. O'Brien."

"I accept without further parley," said O'Brien. "Have you a telephone?"

"Yes," said Lawrence.

"A regular swell, this lad," said O'Brien, smiling. "Well, give Mr. Ridgeway our address, and let's go down and get fired."

They descended, reconnoitered the corridor carefully, and retraced their steps. Mr. Ridgeway entered his office alone and pressed the button on his desk. A boy appeared.

"I am expecting the young fellow who was with me this morning," he said. "When he comes send him in."

When Lawrence entered, he said severely,

"I have looked your credentials over, young man, and I find that in one or two regards they are not exactly what I desire. If there is anything I can do for you, I will be glad to do it, but I think our talk this morning will have to go for nothing!" He scuffled a few papers on his desk, and Lawrence, in as disappointed a tone as he could muster, said,

"I am very sorry, sir. If you do not care for my services, I think I had better go back to Louisville. I have a standing offer of a job in the Aircraft Company's shops there."

As he spoke he noiselessly stepped forward and handed Mr. Ridgeway a paper with his telephone number on it.

"I insist on giving you a check for your railroad fare," said Mr. Ridgeway, and took up a pen. What he wrote however was not the few magic words on a blank check, but the words, "Do not come here. Go to your apartment and stay there until ten tonight. Then both of you come to my address; skirt the wall until you find a gate. It will be unlocked. Follow the path at the right until you come to a porch with a French window. This will be open. Go into the room and wait there in the dark until I come."

Lawrence nodded and handed the note back. Mr. Ridgeway touched a match to it, at the same time lighting a cigar so that the smell of burned paper would not be evident.

"Thank you, sir," said Lawrence as though he had received a check. "And good-bye."

The door closed, and he was alone. He sat staring at the edge of the table that hid the wicked little device which had handed him over into the hands of his enemies. No wonder plans had gone wrong! And now when so much hinged on the attitude of the country to the new Republic in Europe, and when the question of a mammoth loan was a matter of the most importance. As he mused, O'Brien jerked the door open and came in. Although O'Brien knew that the listener at the end of the tiny wire could not see him, he was by nature too much of an actor not to play the whole part. So he came in swaggering and approaching the table

said truculently, "I come back to see you, sir, on something important."

"Speak up, my man," said Mr. Ridgeway. "I am rather busy, and hereafter you will send in your name."

"I won't send nothing," said O'Brien, "unless I get a raise. I work twice as hard and long as any man at the field, and there are twenty planes to look over and keep in order, to say nothing of that dirigible that I will have to nurse back to health. I want more money."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Ridgeway.

"No such thing!" growled O'Brien. "I know you! Take me or leave me!"

"It's the latter then, O'Brien. I won't be bullied by you or any other man," said Mr. Ridgeway with a wink.

"Then that settles it," said O'Brien. "Belave me when I say I am glad to be through with the likes of you, and if you will pay me what you owe I will get me a job where I am appreciated."

He pointed toward the door with his stubby thumb, and Mr. Ridgeway, taking the hint, said, "Wait here and I will get your money," and left the room.

As soon as the door closed O'Brien proceeded to abuse Mr. Ridgeway with all the fluency and fervor of his Irish tongue. Clearly and distinctly he addressed the air with a shower of choice phrases. He abused, he threatened, he raved, never once for-

getting to hold his voice clear and steady as though addressing a stupid central on a buzzing line. According to his remarks, Mr. Ridgeway had insulted him. And he would get even. Over and over, he promised himself that he would get even. And then in the very middle of O'Brien's finest flight of fancy, the door opened. Like turning off a top, O'Brien shut up, took what Mr. Ridgeway offered him and with a growl went out, slamming the door.

"Good riddance!" growled Mr. Ridgeway in his turn, then shaking his fist at the table, he too went out, springing the lock.

The rest of the afternoon he spent at the Chevy Chase golf course but it is likely that a worse game was never played over that course. The Honorable Theodore Miller, who had asked him to play, went through one fit of amazement and remorse into another. Amazement that such tops and foozles could come from a sane man, and remorse that he was obliged to waste the afternoon with such a being. Mr. Ridgeway did not notice that he was playing badly, but thumped and whacked away at the ball with a frowning look that Senator Miller took for an earnest desire to mend his stroke, but which in fact indicated utter absent-mindedness. Mr. Ridgeway knew that if he was being watched, he must put up an appearance of unconcern, and so the Golf Club.

But that night soon after dinner he spoke a few words over a private wire that led to the private

room of a Certain Great Person, and soon Mr. Ridgeway was with him in close consultation. He came away looking more anxious than ever. He had learned that an answer had been drawn up for the young republic which needed help, and that another country close on its borders was ready to declare war if there seemed to be anything in the way of affiliation with the United States. Besides this, there reposed in the strongest of the strong boxes at the Treasury the crown jewels of a monarch who had sent them across for safe keeping six years ago, and who now wanted them returned at once to figure at the introduction of the Crown Prince on his twenty-first birthday.

The jewels and the state papers all must be delivered safely within two months. Otherwise. . . . Mr. Ridgeway did not like to think of the otherwise.

The jewels had no business in the country at all. They had been allowed to come over piecemeal, by the ill-advised judgment of one who should have known enough to keep clear of everything to do with little principalities with their many entanglements and jealousies. However, the deed was done.

Walking along Pennsylvania Avenue, Mr. Ridgeway called at The Willard to see a man who was then in Bolivia, and took a taxi to the Army and Navy Club. Then he went home, and to his own room, where he lighted all the lights and for a mo-

ment stood looking out the window before pulling down the blinds.

Then hastily he slipped off his shoes and felt his way down to the library, where he seated himself in his favorite chair beside the big table and, leaning back, gave himself up to his thoughts. He knew that it would be fifteen minutes or so before he could expect his visitors.

Suddenly a draft of air struck the back of his head. He knew that he had closed the door leading into the hall. He turned and half rose in his chair, but too late. Something descended with a sickening thud and without a groan he rolled over on the floor, a dead weight.

When later O'Brien and Lawrence entered by the window, as they had been told, they sat down on a couple of chairs that they were able to find in the darkness and proceeded to wait. But O'Brien was like a hound. He *sensed* disaster. Leaning close to Lawrence, he whispered, "There is something wrong here. I can smell it. I am going to light up." With the words, he pressed on his electric searchlight, and slowly turned the brilliant ray about the room. What he saw caused him to leap to the window, lower the blind, and then switch on the big ceiling light.

Half under the table lay a tumbled figure. All the drawers were dragged out and ransacked and scattered papers which had been hastily unfolded and read were scattered everywhere.

"Is he dead?" gasped Lawrence.

O'Brien listened to Mr. Ridgeway's heart. "Niver a bit! Sure he's coming round pretty quick belike. What's in that vase of posies? Wather? Gimme!"

He turned the big vase over on the unconscious man, and while nearly drowning him, it brought him to consciousness with a gasp. He looked up.

"Don't rise, sir!" begged O'Brien. "Lay still now and collect your thoughts. Golly, that was a crack! I told you what would happen, didn't I then? You are needing a nurse, and a steel jacket and a tin lid like the good old times of the late war if so be you are going to get tapped like this."

In a few minutes Mr. Ridgeway was able to sit up, and with a rueful look gazed around at the disordered room. With a little help he got into his chair, and sighed. O'Brien, as though he had always been an inmate of the house, went through the dining-room, and beyond in a little breakfast room found a percolator all ready for breakfast. In a jiffy he had the coffee ready, and returned to Mr. Ridgeway with a steaming cup which he insisted on him drinking. The hot liquid seemed to revive Mr. Ridgeway, and presently he sat up, asking:

"Well, O'Brien and Lawrence, what part did you play in the late unpleasantness?"

CHAPTER IV

O'Brien burst out with an exclamation of anger, "By gosh, sir, this thing is going too far! I don't intend to stand by and see you murdered. You have had a close shave here tonight, and something has *got* to be done. Where is Mrs. Ridgeway?"

"She is in England visiting some relatives," said Mr. Ridgeway with a triumphant laugh. "So you won't get any backing from her. I sent her over there three months ago."

"Well, *something* has got to be done all right, all right," said the secret service man sullenly.

Mr. Ridgeway pressed his aching head. "I think this will end it," he said. "They have found no papers, and they will let well enough alone. You know as well as I do, O'Brien, that they will know that I will be on guard after this. And I *will* be. I will set a lot of detectives around here, each with a badge as big as a dinner plate. And I will sit and do nothing, and you can do the work."

"All right; that is more like what I want to hear," said O'Brien, smiling at last. "You are doing enough, Mr. Ridgeway, when you finance the affair. You have had all those airplanes built, and those dirigibles, and if you sit tight and boss, that

is all we will ask for. Just you let me and Lawrence push the rest of the work."

"I will have to keep quiet for a day or two anyway," said Mr. Ridgeway. "I feel sort of old tonight. I wish I had a son or two to look out for me. But you are all right, O'Brien. Do whatever you like."

"Then to bed you go, first of all," said the practical Irishman, "and whilst I get some plain-clothes men here for a guard, you can sit with him, Lawrence, and don't you let a soul in the room."

"The servants are all in bed and there is no one else to come," said Mr. Ridgeway drowsily.

With a good deal of help he managed to get to the little automatic elevator, and they put him to bed. While Lawrence put cold compresses on the bruised head, O'Brien telephoned for the police and placed a guard around the house. Then he summoned Mr. Ridgeway's doctor, who examined the wound and assured them that there was not concussion. By the time all this was done, it was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

"Let's to bed," yawned O'Brien. "It's coming home with you I am, Larry. I expect you'll loan me the matter of some pajammies?"

"Sure!" said Lawrence. "But I don't know how they will fit."

"Fit, fit!" said O'Brien, hailing a passing taxi. "Fit? Sure, I could sleep this night in lead pajammies, any size whatever."

True enough, O'Brien rolled into bed and was asleep in a moment, but Lawrence tossed restlessly a long time before he could quiet himself. He was worried about Mr. Ridgeway, and he wished O'Brien would wake up and tell him just what he feared from the spies or conspirators, or whatever they were. And he wondered about Mr. Ridgeway, and was sorry that he had no sons, and wished, poor Lawrence, that *he* was Mr. Ridgeway's son. How proud he would be! But he knew that he would always be Lawrence Petit, the waif, with only a pictured face for a family.

O'Brien snored on gently and endlessly, and at last, lulled by the sound, Lawrence went to sleep. When he awoke, O'Brien was in the bathroom running a bath, and singing *Sweet Rosy O'More* in a mellow baritone. He sounded like a man who has not a care in the world.

Lawrence jumped up. It was eight o'clock. They had overslept an hour. But when he asked O'Brien how he had happened to sleep so late, that songful gentleman declared that there was nothing to do but enjoy themselves and he intended to go to a movie and sit through it twice, so he could think.

"Will you go along with me?" he asked.

"I would rather fly," said Lawrence. "I wish I could get hold of a plane. I would feel better if I could get off the earth for a while. I can never think so well as when I am up a few hundred feet."

"Go as high as you like," said O'Brien. "Here, I will give you a bit of a paper, and just you go out to the field and give it to the man in charge there, and all that you will have to do after that is to pick which plane you want. You can't use the dirigible because it is smashed up."

"I would rather have a plane to-day," said Lawrence. "I want to get used to the country around here. I shall drive the dirigible when it is in order, but I like to take my bearings first. It is funny, I have flown all over the United States and Europe, but this is the first time I was ever in Washington."

"Well, take one of the little sky-flivvers and have a good time, but be careful about landin'. A nose-dive or a tail-spin makes good readin' in the Sunday papers, and you get a grand write-up all about the darin' young aviator So-and-So, but it's little interest *you* feel in the article yourself."

Lawrence took a street car out as far as he could, and after a brisk walk reached the field. Everything was going smoothly. He offered his paper to the man in charge, and that individual, after grumbling a little at letting a kid go up with a perfectly good machine, let Lawrence look the twenty planes over and choose the one he fancied.

Lawrence refused a passenger, and with a good start soared off the field and rose until the city of Washington lay far below him. He had not made a flight for a couple of weeks, and his heart thrilled.

After a few wide circles that took in the shipping at the Navy Yard and all the outlying parts of the city, he flew over Baltimore. The return he made low, and studied the woods and landing places, to make himself sure of his ground.

As he neared Washington again, he saw a plane approaching from the south. It came straight for him, and he had an idea that it was trying to communicate with him by means of the wireless. He glanced down and found that, contrary to usage, his own machine was not equipped. So he paid no attention to the stranger other than to swerve out of the way. But the plane turned and followed. Lawrence, curious to know what it was up to, slowed down and allowed it to overtake him. His trained ear told him by the sound of the engine that his own plane was the faster and more powerful but he had no intention of racing as he thought the other pilot wanted to do.

So he slowed down, and as the other machine came alongside he saw that they were flashing messages with a mirror, using the Morse code, which had become one of the requirements in the public schools.

"Who are you?" demanded the stranger. "Who are you?" over and over. Lawrence had no mirror and for a moment was at a loss how to reply. There was something threatening about the manner of the other plane, and Lawrence had no desire to get into a combat in the clouds over noth-

ing. He had an idea, and as the other plane imperiously repeated the words he managed to take off the muffler, and in the roar of the engine he spelled out:

"A tourist seeing the sights. Who are you?"

"Where from?" demanded the mirror.

"Louisville. Who are you?" repeated Lawrence.

The plane evidently had the answer they wanted and, sheering off, shot away without a reply. Lawrence set his teeth. If they could be so discourteous he could follow at all events, and see where the curious plane hailed from. He wheeled his machine and, taking a higher level, sailed off in pursuit, keeping a good distance behind. An hour's flight brought them above a small open field and here the plane suddenly dipped, and going at a breakneck angle dropped to the ground. Then as though by magic it disappeared. There was no hangar, yet the machine went under cover as though the earth had swallowed it.

Again and again Lawrence circled the field, and it worried him to imagine the chuckles the other pilot was indulging in at his expense.

Try as he might, he could not locate any sign of life. It struck him as a rather queer thing. He turned his nose upward again, and located the field by some trees and other landmarks, then turned toward the home field.

Dropping easily down, he found O'Brien sur-

rounded by a group of men, all of whom seemed to be watching him with a good deal of interest.

"Hey, young felly," called O'Brien, "do you always make so neat a landing as that last?"

"I suppose so," answered Lawrence. "What was there about that one?"

"It was all right; that was it," said O'Brien. "If that's the way you fly, you can have all me pretty toys at once, on a string."

"One is enough," laughed Lawrence. "Don't you want to go up?"

"I wouldn't mind a short flight, just to see how you manage it," said O'Brien, gently relieving the man next him of his helmet and goggles.

Rising once more, Lawrence waited until they had gained a good height, then as they sailed along in a steady current, he told O'Brien of his encounter and the curious thing about the landing place of the strange car and its sudden disappearance.

"Let's go over there," said O'Brien. "It's just the sort of thing I have to look after. What with the country full of Reds, and all other colors of the rainbow, we want to keep as many of the wild lunatics under observation as possible."

They soon reached the spot where Lawrence had seen the plane land and, sure enough, there was not a sign of anything that could be taken for a hangar.

"You sure this is the place?" asked O'Brien.

"Sure!" replied Lawrence. "What do you say to landing? I can make it easier than he did."

"Land away if ye like, and let's have a look," said O'Brien, "but don't you smear me all over that nice green grass, I warn you."

"I won't," promised Lawrence, and dropped to earth as lightly as a bird.

As the plane slid along the grass and came to a standstill, O'Brien gave a smothered exclamation.

"That's funny!" he said. "Look!"

Stepping out of the machine, Lawrence turned in the direction O'Brien was looking. The hangar they were looking for was there, but covered with a thick-set camouflage of brush. The doors were open, as though no one would possibly find the place, and inside the hangar were three cars: one a dirigible, one the car Lawrence had encountered, while the third was a long, rakish model mounting an aircraft gun.

One quick look, and O'Brien backed out, drawing Lawrence with him. He motioned him into their own plane, gave it a push and hopped into his place as the speedy little flyer danced along for a moment, then rose into the air.

As they fled, O'Brien mopped his brow.

"I didn't feel that place to be so healthy for us," he said. "And a gun looking so fit! Who said the war was over these five years? Now what in the world of wonders does all that mean? I dunno. Do *you?*"

Lawrence shook his head.

"Don't go there again," warned O'Brien. "Whether I'm with you or no. Do you mind? We have got to find out about it. Did you notice anything funny about that dirigible? No? Well, you don't know as well as I do, but that old tube is exactly like the one that got cut up last night. Down to the last seam, and even a dent in the steerin' gear that I made meself trippin' against it with a hammer in me hand."

"How do you suppose that happens?" asked Lawrence, his eyes fixed in the distance.

"That's what I dunno," said O'Brien. "But the joke is that I don't think it happens at all. There is something funny about that. Dang funny!"

"Where do you suppose the people were?" asked Lawrence.

"Off amusin' themselves, or up to some mischief," answered O'Brien. "They have such a good hidin' place that they don't bother to guard their cars at all, at all."

They landed, O'Brien still sputtering. But Lawrence was silent. He quizzed O'Brien about the locality and learned that it was not far from the railroad. Then finding that O'Brien had an engagement for the evening, he went quietly away. He first went to his rooms, took some money from the trunk, and put on a dark suit. Then he hurried down town, and reaching the Union station,

boarded a train and was soon out of the city. He had dinner on the train, and at about nine o'clock reached the little station of Linden, where he dropped off and not waiting for the train to pull out, slipped across the track and was swallowed up by the shadows.

For all his athletics, Lawrence hated walking, as most aviators do, and he groaned in spirit as he trudged over the country in what he hoped was the direction of the mysterious aviation field. It had not occurred to him to ask anyone how to reach it. Instinctively he knew that the mysterious cars had not been heralded to the country at large.

He lost time, and several times had to turn aside and almost retrace his steps, but at last he knew from the lay of the country that he was in the right neighborhood. The moon had risen and was full. It cast the densest shadows and Lawrence slipped from one patch of blackness to another. He felt silly. He was not sure that this was not a wild goose chase. The cars might be the property of some eccentric man who wished to keep them in seclusion, and possibly he was trespassing on private ground. He plodded on, however, urged by an impulse he could not understand.

At last he emerged suddenly on the very aviation field itself; and on the other side he saw the big bulk that was the hangar. Once more plunging into the underbrush, he skirted the field and circled it until he found himself at the back of the hangar.

There was a small door here, half open, and from within he heard voices.

He could not hear what was being said, however, and he took the chance an older man would have thought plain suicide. Entering the door, and fairly holding his breath, he stepped slowly and carefully along the side of the building, crept close to the little plane, and finally lay down and wriggled beneath it toward the dirigible. On the other side of the long body four men were sitting over a game of cards. Not until Lawrence felt the cool box of the plane above him did he think of danger. And then it came to him clear as the tolling of a bell . . . discovery meant his death!

CHAPTER V

It was a strange game the men were playing, something far less quiet and controlled than poker, or any of the other American games that Lawrence was accustomed to see played by the men working round the planes. There was much slapping down of cards and a great deal of laughter from three of the players, while the fourth poured forth a steady stream of abuse and profanity. Strangely enough, while Lawrence was sure that they were foreigners, they all spoke English with no more accent than a slight twist of the syllables.

The game went on, and Lawrence gathered that one man was losing steadily.

Luck fluctuated between the others and they accepted gains or loss with careless unconcern. Not so the fourth man. He lost money as painfully as a man loses his very blood. It put him in a sort of wild panic, yet he could not leave the game. He kept hoping for a turn in the bad luck which pursued him and played on, cursing his luck, the cards, the unsteady light, and his partners themselves. Finally his evil temper commenced to grate on the mood of the other three. They too commenced to be faultfinding, until the dealer swept the cards to-

gether and announced that the game was over.

The men did not trouble to rise; they merely kicked the table over, and leaned back in their chairs.

"What of the night?" said one of them, peering out the crack of the big door.

"Clear as a bell," said another, "and the moon big as the dial of the clock at Nuremberg. I say we take the two planes and go out."

Lawrence felt a small chill travel down his spine. He held his breath for the answer, while all his muscles tautened for a quick retreat.

"Not tonight," answered the oldest man. "The machines both need tuning up. I have worked on that dirigible so constantly that I have neglected all else. But there is no haste. No haste whatever, with their broken dirigible and what happened last night." He commenced to laugh, and in response the man who had lost at cards began to swear again.

"Yes; what happened last night?" he said. "A knock-out staged by a pair of fools!"

"It was an accident," said another man sulkily. "Fifteen minutes before I saw him at the Army and Navy Club. Then I opened the door, after seeing that every servant in the place was sleeping sweetly, and there he sat and he *saw* me. There was nothing else to do. The Chief had forbidden a fight. I gave him a good knock. Wonder if I killed him!"

"I don't think so," said the oldest man. "I stepped on his leg as I was going around the table, after we had looked over his papers, and there was a live feel to the flesh. You should have struck to kill. Then there would have been a hue and cry and we could have worked so much better. He is the master mind."

"We have nothing to do with him, of course, but it galls me to think any man can be so close. Not a soul knows what he will do next, that Ridgeway; no one knows where he will turn. I cannot understand why he was so careless with that dirigible, leaving it there in that hangar for all the world to see. And advertising it for traffic! Now as soon as it is in shape again, I must deface our dirigible with just the same marks and mends. It must be so similar that not even the driver of the Ridgeway machine, after we kidnap him, will feel the least hesitation about taking our dirigible where he has been ordered to go."

"When will we see the Chief?" asked the loser at cards.

"I have been expecting him since yesterday," said the oldest man, "but he won't take the chance of coming out in daylight now."

They sat smoking, and Lawrence, whose chances seemed to be getting slimmer every moment, wondered how he could escape before the men made a move. He was not sure that his feet were not sticking out at the other side of the plane, and al-

though the hangar was pitch dark except where the dim light above the group of men made it possible for them to see, Lawrence did not like to feel that they might at any moment make a move toward the small door back of him, and trip over him. But there was not a chance of moving while they sat silently smoking. If they would *only* commence to talk!

As they sat engrossed in their pipes a current of air fanned Lawrence and he knew that the big door of the hangar had silently swung open. He heard the four men spring to their feet as a soft voice said, "Good evening!"

"Good evening, Excellency," said the four, and the newcomer replied in an irritated tone:

"Not that! How many times have I told you not to call me Excellency? There are no longer any Excellencies. I am plain Mr. Smith. Such a good, honest name and a good, honest man! You know I travel for a book concern, and all my anxiety is for the number of copies of their book I sell. Do you understand?"

"Yes, your — Mr. Smith," said the man, and Mr. Smith sat down on the nearest chair.

"Shut that door," he ordered. "Why do you infernal blockheads leave it open with all this light streaming out?"

"It was closed until you came in, Mr. Smith," said the oldest man in an apologetic, submissive tone.

"Then all the more reason for shutting it!" said the newcomer.

He felt in his pocket and drew out a silver cigarette case. One of the little tubes fell out as he fumbled for it, and selecting another, the man lighted it and commenced to smoke. His back was squarely toward Lawrence, and even his figure was not discernible in the poor light.

Lawrence settled himself for whatever was to come. He knew somehow that a single move on his part would be detected by a pair of ears far keener than those others. In fact, there was something so sinister about the carriage and tone of the man who called himself Mr. Smith that Lawrence was not at all sure that he would not turn at any moment and say, "Come out of your hiding place, Lawrence Petit!" He felt himself grow cold all over. Once a rattlesnake had crawled over his foot and he had stood like a statue waiting for the deadly thing to creep away without being stirred to anger, and the same feeling of oppression chilled him now. He knew instinctively that he was in the presence of the most deadly and merciless human being he had ever encountered. Yet all he could pin his feeling to was the dim shadow of a form and the sound of a voice which was certainly soft and agreeable to the ear.

The cigarette which had fallen out lay on the ground and added to the boy's danger. If Smith or one of the others should stoop to pick it up, they

might easily discover him. As the oldest man commenced to talk, Lawrence made a cautious movement backward. That instant Smith held up a hand and whispered, "Silence!"

Lawrence stilled his very heart beats. For an interminable time there was not a sound, then Smith lowered his hand and said, "Go on! I was sure I heard something, but I must have been mistaken. If I lose my sense of hearing I will be out of luck."

The men laughed in a guarded way. "If you lose nine-tenths of it and nine-tenths of your eyesight, you will be about like the rest of us," said the oldest man.

"Thanks!" said Mr. Smith dryly. "Now for a report. Did you discover anything at all at the Ridgeways? I presume you went, as I ordered."

"Yes, we went all right," someone answered out of the gloom. "It came near being a good deal of a mess. We got in the house all right. I had been there for two days looking over the electric wiring for the city, and had seen to it that all the servants went to bed with just enough dope in their food to insure them a good night's sleep. Then we went outside to look things over, and I went down town and ran right into the gentleman. So I dogged him, and he went into the Army and Navy Club, and I came back. I walked, and he must have taxied because when we opened the door from the hall, there he was sitting in the library in the dark.

I can't imagine what he was doing that for. He was wide awake and when I opened the door he turned round. Of course I had to hit him."

"Well, what next?" asked Smith as the other paused.

"It was a good one," said the man. "He fell like a sack of sand, and we switched on a light and went through everything in two minutes. There is not a thing there. Not a thing, and no wall safe, and no secret drawers!"

"Well, that is odd," mused the newcomer. "You left him unconscious?"

"Yes, but he was alive," said the man.

"I don't understand," said Smith. "There was not a thing in the morning paper about this, and no mention of illness or anything else. I remember especially noticing that Hamilton Ridgeway would lay the cornerstone for a new orphanage or something of the sort this morning. I don't believe you hit him at all!"

"He did!" said the third man. "It was such a crack that I was sure he had killed him."

"Well, it is strange," muttered the man called Smith. "We must find out more about this. Are you through with your electrical job?"

"Yes. I was careful to finish that up yesterday. That was why the butler asked me to supper in the servants' hall. I made a hit with all of them below-stairs."

Smith sat for a long while thinking. "All

right," he said finally. "I will have a look at things. You had better go back to your old job at the Ridgeway field. Say you have been off because you were sick. And put down a note of every scratch and dent and seam on that dirigible of theirs so you can reproduce it. Remember one thing. There are powerful forces back of us, but all they want is the papers that will sooner or later go across in that dirigible.

"What *we* want is money, and I tell you, men, if this thing goes through, it will bring us millions. Just that: millions!"

A sort of stifled groan of covetousness went up from the listeners.

"If we succeed there will never be a time when we will any of us have to do another stroke of work. If we fail, it will mean death. Fail? Why, you won't *dare* to fail! I will kill any man of you with my own hand if he shows the white feather."

He laughed, and Lawrence thought he heard the rattles of the coiled snake ready to spring. The men listened in silence. Lawrence wondered if his face carried the same chill as his words and voice.

After a pause, one of the men spoke. "I think we are all taking big chances," he said. "All I object to is working in the dark. Here we are working and plotting, killing if necessary, all on the promise of immense rewards, yet you will not tell us where these rewards are hidden. It all rests on your word."

"Did I ever fail you?" asked Smith violently, striking his hand on his knee. "What about the jewel robbery in Paris? The diamonds in New York? Did I even send them to Amsterdam for re-cutting before showing them to you, and weighing them up? Was there not a fair division when the job was done? You thankless dogs, you would be picking pockets if I had not taken charge of you!"

"That is all right, Chief," said the big man, "but it would give us a good deal more interest if we could know where all this money is being kept."

Smith laughed. "I suppose you want to know so if I should get a tap on the head myself some night you could go after it. Isn't that about it?"

"No," said the man, "but part of it is true. What if anything *should* really happen to you? Where would *we* be?"

"And suppose I should tell you on my word of honor that the riches are buried here, right here in this hangar, where would *I* be?"

Somehow Lawrence sensed a straining forward of the four listeners.

"Sit still, sit still!" said Smith. "It is not here, so it won't pay you to dig a nice hole in search of it, and incidentally bury me after you have finished. No, the treasure — ah, *such* treasure, glittering, golden, jewelled treasure such as you have never dreamed of, is not here. It is quite safe elsewhere. Quite, quite safe!"

Again he laughed.

"Where is it?" asked the oldest man again. "We want to know!"

"Perhaps it is only fair," said Smith, shrugging his shoulders. He took out another cigarette and lighted it leisurely. "Perhaps it is only fair," he repeated. "Besides, you might like to go and look at the beautiful strong old casket that holds the jewels and treasure. Well, then if you must know," he blew a cloud of smoke tantalizingly toward them. "Your treasure, and mine, is in the United States Treasury."

"You, you —" sputtered the oldest man.

"Don't tell me I *lie*," warned the smooth voice. "I do occasionally, but no man dares to *tell* me that I do. And this is the truth. Your treasure and mine is in the Treasury Building. Until it is taken out, we must wait. Even I cannot offer to break into that stronghold."

"I don't understand," said the loser at cards.

"Of course you don't!" said Smith. "You don't have to! Only one head is needed on a body. *I* am the head. Do my bidding, you hands and feet, and all will be well. Millions, remember; *millions,* and one-fourth to be divided amongst you. I am going," he said, abruptly dismissing the topic. "Come!"

He rose, and before Lawrence could gather himself for the shock of discovery, the group, led by the rattlesnake, passed out the big door of the hangar, and Lawrence heard the lock snap loudly.

CHAPTER VI

LAWRENCE could scarcely credit his good fortune. After a little he tried to change his position, and found that he was so cramped that he could scarcely move. Carefully he took his pocket flash out of his pocket and, turning it around, acquainted himself with the position of the doors. He also saw the cigarette which the Rattlesnake, as Lawrence henceforth called "Mr. Smith," had dropped, and he crawled over and put it in his pocket. Then with the utmost caution he made his way back to the small door which still swung open, and with a smile at the carelessness of the men, he made his way out. He had gone a hundred yards perhaps when a thought struck him, and he retraced his steps. Once more entering the hangar, he approached the machine nearest him, paused beside it for five or ten minutes, passed on to the next where he stood for the same time, and then went to the big dirigible. With a chuckle he waved a hand at the silent aircraft, and for the last time passed through the door. This time he closed it, and finding a spring lock hooked carelessly through a strong staple, he adjusted it and clasped the lock. The hangar was securely fastened. Lawrence

judged, and correctly, that when the men returned in the morning each would think that one of the others had closed and locked the small door, and not caring to be caught in so flagrant a piece of carelessness, not one would confess that he had forgotten it.

As for the boy, he sped rapidly back across the country he had traversed earlier in the evening and by great good fortune caught a train to Washington about two minutes after reaching the little station. As no one had seen him arrive, his departure was not noteworthy.

Lawrence was tired out when the train reached Washington, and he thought with dread of the long trolley ride to the Heights, when he happened to remember that he was now able to afford any number of taxis. He stepped into one at the door of the station, and luxuriously giving his street and number, he leaned back and dozed all the way home.

O'Brien was there before him, a worried man.

"Now then," said he, "where have ye been the while?" He shoved a chair toward Lawrence and offered him a ham sandwich from a paper bag. Lawrence took it eagerly. "You look dead beat and starved and ginnerally tired out. What's the word?"

"You are going to be mad," said Lawrence, "because you told me not to do something and I did it."

"Then consider me frothin', and tell me what's

what and get it over with. Sure, these fits of temper are bad for me heart."

"All right," said Lawrence, and he proceeded to tell O'Brien his evening's adventure. When he produced the cigarette O'Brien took it with careful fingers.

"Whew!" he said as he examined the paper, smelled the tobacco, and tried to make out the interwoven letters of the intricate monogram.

"It looks like r'yalty," he said finally. "Those same cost, me boy, they cost! I only wish you had had a look at the gentleman. Well, I should say you had a narrow escape. I don't like it all the same, although we know more than we did. Mr. Ridgeway is a bit close, too. We didn't know it was jools like that that we were handlin', did we?"

"We haven't handled them yet," said Lawrence. "But I reckon they are just where Mr. Smith said they are, and it looks as though we were going to have to cart them somewhere or other. I don't see why we take the dirigible," said Lawrence, "when the planes are faster."

"There is some good reason," said O'Brien. "For instance, that dirigible will carry a crew large enough to give a pretty good fight if it was necessary. That's *one* thing. Another is that Mr. Ridgeway doesn't know that they know anything about the freight he is to carry. Gee, there is a leak somewhere! That's one thing. Now to bed with you, me wild adventurer, and get some sleep

what's left of the night. We will have to see Mr. Ridgeway the morn, so be he can talk to us. I called there tonight and found him much better. Get you to bed, and don't talk. I want to think. Somewhere or other I have seen a mate to this cigarette."

He carefully wrapped it in a bit of paper and put it in his cigar case. "That's a good souvenir," he remarked, nodding his head.

Lawrence tumbled into bed. He was too tired to realize the narrow escape he had had, and wanted nothing more than a good sleep. He did not realize his fatigue either, and when he awoke in the morning he found that what he had thought was the dimness of early dawn was the darkness of closely drawn blinds. O'Brien had tricked him. There was a note on the dresser, and Lawrence read:

"Dear Lawrence:

"There's no place so safe for a lad of your tendencies as the same cot you are snoring on at this second. I leave you to your dreams and hope they are sweet. As for me, I am pulling down the blinds and disconnecting the telephone, and then I am makin' off: for I have a pretty idea all of my own. I will see you later. By the way, you took my gloves last night, and I can find but one. If you have lost that glove it costs you a pretty penny, gloves being in a high altitude since the late war.

Good-bye. Go see what is happening to the dirigible, go see Mr. Ridgeway, go to a movie, go have a good time however you like but don't you *dare* follow any clues today. Against orders, and meet me here; HERE, mind you, at seven tonight. I may have news.

"O'BRIEN."

After he had had a meal which was neither breakfast nor luncheon, but combined all the most agreeable features of both, commencing with grapefruit and cereal and ending with pie, Lawrence went out to the Aviation Field, where he found the men busily working on the dirigible. A week at most would find it in working order again. O'Brien was not there. After taking a little flight in his favorite plane, a flight which took him over the scene of last night's adventure, he came down, and returned to the apartment where he loafed and read until seven, when O'Brien came in.

"I flew over that field again this afternoon," said Lawrence. "I did not see a soul."

"That's all right," said his friend. "I have been there all day meself in a tree-top, with a pair of glasses strong enough to spot the Queen of England powdering her nose from the base of the Statue of Liberty. There was not a sign of 'em and I have it all worked out. They know we can't use the dirigible, and of course by now they know the minute when it will be in shape again. So why

work? Why hang around that bleak spot? And Mr. Ridgeway being laid up, there's no use for Mr. Smith to sit with his ear glued to the listening post down there below Ridgeway's office. No. It's all hands take a vacation, and I'm thinkin' I will do the same. I am going on a still hunt for our dear little book agent."

"I forgot to tell you," said Lawrence, "that before I left there last night, I fixed all three machines so they won't fly very soon. I learned a few twists back in the aircraft factory, and I can put a plane out of tune so no one will guess that it has been touched, but there is the mischief to pay. And I touched up the dirigible too. Just a screw or two loose, and a couple of pinholes where they will do the most good."

"You are like a woman's postscript," said O'Brien. "All the meat of the letter in it."

"I meant to tell you before," said Lawrence. "Well, if you are going after the Smith man, what am *I* to do?"

"Go see Mr. Ridgeway and tell him all this you have told me. Take the cigarette; it's evidence."

"Suppose we go to the theatre tonight," suggested Lawrence. "I have not seen a show in a month of Sundays."

"Sunday is no day to go to shows on, anyhow," said O'Brien with mock severity. "But this bein' a week day it's not against me conscience to accompany you."

They decided on the vaudeville, and securing good seats settled down to an evening's enjoyment.

At the beginning of the second act two men came in and took the seats just behind them. As they fumbled for the hat-clips under the seats and leaned close to O'Brien's broad shoulders, Lawrence heard one say to the other, "Did you bring the key to the hangar?" and the other answered swiftly, "No; Mr. Smith took it."

Lawrence felt his blood stop in its course. For a moment he could scarcely breathe. Two of the mysterious men were behind them! He dared not say much to O'Brien, but he whispered, as the orchestra blared out a jazz accompaniment to a dancer: "See who is behind you?"

O'Brien turned. To Lawrence's utter amazement, he nodded gaily and said, "Good evenin', Brown! A good show, I'm thinkin'."

"It seems to be, Mr. O'Brien," said the slow, deep voice Lawrence so well remembered.

The boy's head whirled. O'Brien knew the man!

Between the acts, in the intermission, Lawrence led the way out to the sidewalk. He was shaking.

"Those men!" he managed to stutter. "Those men behind us! They were in that card game!"

"Crazy!" said O'Brien calmly. "The big one works at the Aviation Field. He's a good worker, but mortal stupid."

"Oh, *believe* me, O'Brien!" begged Lawrence. "I know them both. They were sitting so I could

see their shapes, and just now I heard the big one ask the other if he had the key to the hangar, and he said, no, Smith had it."

"Why, I *know* the man," insisted O'Brien again. "He don't know enough to be in a plot."

"That's just what Smith said," said Lawrence. "He said they could be feet and hands, and he would be the head. That is why everything goes wrong with the dirigible. He is right there where he can do what he likes, and *you* trust him."

O'Brien laughed and patted the boy on the shoulder. "This thing is getting on your nerves," he said soothingly. "However, come back and have another look at your two friends."

"No," said Lawrence. "You go back, and I will wait outside, and when they come out I shall follow them. They don't know that we came together. We didn't talk much and they will just think I met you in the theatre."

"Have it your own way," said O'Brien. "I will say the remarks were suspicious enough, but I tell you, man, I know that fellow."

"All right," said Lawrence doggedly. "I mean to know him, too, before I get through with him. I have not seen him at the Field since I came. Where does he keep himself?"

"Dunno," said O'Brien. "I will find out."

He went back into the theatre and sat down. As soon as the curtain went down on the next act, he turned and spoke to the big man.

"Are you working at the Field yet, Brown?"

"No, I quit a week ago," said Brown, leaning forward. "I couldn't stand the foreman they have out there. A mean, suspicious lunkhead, always snooping around and giving orders." He laughed uneasily. "So I quit."

"Out of a job, are you?" said O'Brien.

"Yes, I am," said Brown.

"Well, I don't blame you much," said O'Brien. "That foreman is a disagreeable cuss. If I can help you any way, let me know."

"Thanks," from Brown. "I am thinking some of going away. If I stay here I will let you know."

"Do!" urged O'Brien. "I wouldn't like to miss seein' you."

The next act came on, and O'Brien turned to the stage. He missed seeing the glance that passed from one man to the other, and chuckled as he thought of the fancy Lawrence had had. When the show was over, the two men walked down toward the cafés, and O'Brien was amused to see the slight figure of Lawrence sliding along after them. His collar was turned up, and his soft hat had disappeared. In its place was a plaid cap.

"Detective stuff!" laughed O'Brien. "The kid is having the time of his life. But it does seem queer. However, there's no distress about the affair so long as I can see. We wait our chance, and off we go with our precious bundles when they are not looking. It is too simple to be funny. They

have overstepped with their slugging Mr. Ridgeway and cutting up our dirigible. They can't hurt us now. Forewarned is forearmed."

He strolled along until he came to The Willard, where he went in and approaching the news stand commenced to look for a magazine that was adventurous enough to suit his fancy. As he stooped, the man beside him let a cigarette fall from his hand. Someone had jostled him. It dropped directly under O'Brien's eyes, and gleaming up at him he saw the intricate gold monogram of Smith's cigarette. Before he could straighten up and face the man, a foot was planted on the cigarette and he rose to see no one but an old gentleman beside him smoking a fat black havana. It was certainly not Smith. Besides, a voice loudly proclaimed the old gentleman as "Hemmingway, old boy," and O'Brien, furious with his luck, hung around the lobby for hours, hoping for another chance to see the expensive monogram and delicate cork tip.

After awhile he gave up and went back to the apartment that he now shared with Lawrence.

The boy was there before him, walking the floor in a great state of excitement.

"Well, O'Brien," he burst out, "I ran them down!"

CHAPTER VII

In a wild rush of words Lawrence told what he had discovered. O'Brien listened closely and at the end of the account nodded his head.

"You have 'em pickled this time, me jool," he said. "It is damnation enough if they so much as live in that place you're mentionin'. I know the local cutthroats and pipemen, while every son of Ham that walks there has a razor ready for use, right in his closed fist. I'm that glad you came out with a whole skin. Now don't talk; lave me think."

He filled a pipe and slowly drawing on it, sat with his eyes fixed on a corner of the room, a look of abstraction on his usually jolly face.

At last he spoke.

"Here's how I dope it. It's plain Mr. Ridgeway has picked you on your recommendations to drive that dirigible. All right. Tomorrow you go to Mr. Ridgeway as his guest or long-lost nephew or what not. Anyhow, you *stay right in his house* as his guest. There's that much less chance of losin' you if they get on to who you are. And it's a slick crowd we are buttin' in on. When it comes time for you to start with your silly little papers

and your shiny little jewelry wherever they belong, (and Mr. Ridgeway will have to tell that,) you can just start on, and O'Brien will take the job makin' the other crowd miss their train, as you might say. What's the time o' night? "

"Twelve thirty," said Lawrence.

"Pretty late," replied O'Brien, "but let's have a try."

He picked up the telephone and almost immediately had Mr. Ridgeway on the wire. After a moment's talk, he took his hat and told Lawrence to follow him. In a taxi, they arrived at Mr. Ridgeway's house and found that gentleman reading in his room.

O'Brien outlined his plan.

"That is a very good idea," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Of course if this was merely an affair of those crown jewels, it would be easy to outwit our friends but those jewels mean little or nothing to the man who calls himself Smith. What he wants are the papers. Either he, or someone back of him, is staging a little revolution, I think, and the papers are their most important weapon. Who is Smith? Can't you make a guess, O'Brien? "

O'Brien shook his head. "I can't, sir," he said regretfully. "All I want is some good-luck fairy to point him out to me."

"You will find him, never fear," said Mr. Ridgeway. "You have done too many clever jobs for me to feel worried about this one. Well, Law-

rence, I will be glad to have you here with me. When will you come?"

"He is here now," laughed O'Brien. "I take no more chances. I'm like yourself, sir; I'm thinkin' that the matter of these papers is an affair of nations."

Mr. Ridgeway looked grave. "I can only say that the safe transfer of those papers is all that can possibly keep this country out of another war as destructive and as deadly as the last. They have clever spies, and the only thing they have not surmised, guessed at, or proved about this journey is the identity of the pilot. As I said at the first, Lawrence is protected by his youth." The great man sighed. "Lawrence, I wish you were my son!" he said.

"A nice kid," commended O'Brien with a twinkle. "But hard to manage, sir, and tellin' too little."

For four days Lawrence was a guest in the big house, spending most of the time with his host and growing more and more devoted to the kindly, shrewd man. He often repeated his regret that there was no son to carry on his name, and one night in a confidential mood told Lawrence that there had been two little boys.

"But we lost them both when they were scarcely more than babies," he said brokenly. "I cannot talk about it." He stopped and Lawrence, respect-

ing his grief, turned away, not daring to offer the sympathy and affection he felt.

The subject was never referred to again, but now Lawrence knew the pathetic meaning of the two small, beautiful faces which had been rendered in glass and which formed the central medallion in a great stained glass window in the library. Near it, on the wall, was a portrait of Mrs. Ridgeway, painted only the year before. It was a most gracious figure, with a sweet, beautiful, appealing face, full of sorrow bravely concealed. It held a strange fascination for Lawrence, who found himself looking at it by the hour. Mr. Ridgeway never spoke of the picture, although Lawrence knew that no two people ever loved each other better than the great man and his beautiful wife. That she had been sent away to avoid possible harm was clear to Lawrence, and he felt that Mr. Ridgeway was very lonely. Lawrence tried to show him all the little attentions that he could think of, and it pleased him to see how eagerly Mr. Ridgeway accepted them. Only once in awhile a sigh told the boy that the big heart still mourned for the two little fellows who had met an untimely death so long ago. But no further word was spoken on the subject.

The fifth day of Lawrence's visit fell on Tuesday. He took his bath and hurriedly dressing, went down the broad stairs three steps at a time. For the cleverest sky pilot in the world was hungry just

as though he had been an ordinary boy with no thought above the Saturday football game or a coming exam. He fell upon the delicious breakfast with an amount of energy that made Mr. Ridgeway smile with pleasure.

"I want you to eat a good big breakfast, old man," he said. "I want you to take me for a spin in the air after while."

"That's good," said Lawrence. "If I don't fly more than I am doing now, I will have to give up my license and take a job as instructor somewhere. I am getting all out of practice."

"You can have some practice today," said Mr. Ridgeway. He went from the breakfast table to the telephone, and immediately they hurried out to the Aviation Field in Mr. Ridgeway's runabout. There the first person who met them was O'Brien, all in leather, with his goggles in his hand.

"Your things are in the locker room," he said to Lawrence. "Get into them quickly. Mr. Ridgeway is plannin' quite a little trip for you."

Ten minutes later, they embarked in one of the larger planes, and went sailing off, O'Brien at the wheel, cutting a straight course toward the east. In a wild rush of speed, reeling league after league of sky behind them, they reached the Atlantic coast and, swerving, made for the desolate reaches of Barnegat. Lawrence, to whom this was new territory, watched everything with the greatest interest.

The tide was out, and just below the Inlet a half-mile stretch of beach, hard and firm, afforded a wonderful landing. O'Brien dropped brilliantly, and leaving the plane, they walked back until they came to the hangar where the new dirigible was housed. Lawrence gave a quick sigh of delight when he saw the balloon. He had never seen anything so clean-lined and so sporty looking as the new model. For it was absolutely the latest thing in construction, and Lawrence longed to get his hand on the steering gear.

"What do you think of that?" asked O'Brien as Mr. Ridgeway went outside with one of the men, who seemed to be in charge.

"I never saw anything so fine!" declared Lawrence. "I never saw anything just like it. Even the new models in the pictures in the trade journals are not as good in outline, and do not look as light in construction."

"They are not," said O'Brien. "This is the first time I have seen this but I know it was designed for Mr. Ridgeway."

"What is its fuel?" asked Lawrence.

"Hyolax," said O'Brien. "In a year no gasoline will be used except for old type autos and farm trucks. I tell you hyolax is some bird when it comes to power!"

"I wonder if I will have any trouble managing it," said Lawrence dubiously. "I ought to try it out, seems to me."

"That is what we came for," said O'Brien. "I have an idea you are going across very soon. And Mr. Ridgeway wanted to let you have one chance anyhow to get used to this type of dirigible. As far as hyolax goes, it works exactly like gasoline except that it is about twenty times more concentrated and its driving power is much greater. You will be crazy over it."

A few minutes later the big dirigible, manoeuvered into the open, rose lazily from the sand and in obedience to a command from Mr. Ridgeway, they turned out to sea. For the next two hours, high above the tossing waves, Lawrence manoeuvered the balloon, learning its tricks as a good horseman learns the whims of a favorite steed. Lawrence was crazy over it, as O'Brien had said, and the two older men, Mr. Ridgeway and O'Brien, as well as the two mechanicians who accompanied them, were astounded by the delicate perceptions and skillful handling that the boy pilot gave the balloon.

When at last they had, as O'Brien expressed it, "put the tube to bed" and had once more mounted in the invisible roads of the air, Lawrence was at the wheel of the plane, and bad work he made of it for the first ten minutes. It was like driving a flivver after a twelve-cylinder touring car. The plane wobbled and shifted until he hit his stroke again. Reaching the home field, Lawrence silently hopped out of the plane and followed Mr. Ridge-

way and O'Brien into the auto. He was very still all the way home. The day was gone, and dinner was served soon after their return. Then Mr. Ridgeway sat frowning, and presently leaned forward to say:

"I will have to have a talk with you both, and on my life I don't know where we will be safe. I am afraid everywhere."

"Right you are!" said O'Brien. "But I have just the place. A brother of mine has a drug store over on H street. There is a basement where he keeps his surplus stock. The stairs is at the right of the store as you go in, away back behind the screen where they dodge to make you up tonic pills out of newspaper and sugar.

"I will go ahead, and tip me brother off, and then you come along wan at a time, and when you go in hold on to the left lapel of your coats so he'll know you and go right back to the stairs and down 'em. I will have chairs ready."

The plan worked, and Mr. Ridgeway and Lawrence wandered through the small drug store and down the concealed stairs, to find O'Brien ready with three soap boxes for seats.

Four walls, covered with rows of bottles of all sizes under the sun, comprised the furnishings. As O'Brien said, there was not room enough anywhere for a kitten to hide. There was a door at the top of the stairs, and this O'Brien closed and locked. Another door at the bottom he also closed,

then turned expectantly to Mr. Ridgeway. That gentleman smiled.

"Now then," he said, "it is time for me to show you all the cards. You know, O'Brien, who this Smith is?"

"The most dangerous scoundrel in Europe, and the slickest knave that ever planned the downfall of his own country to satisfy his own miserable ambition. That much and more I know, but try as I may I can't get my eyes on him, nor yet my hands."

"He is slick all right," agreed Mr. Ridgeway. "But thanks to this extra dirigible and the place at Barnegat, we will elude him. That is all I want now. After we are off, O'Brien, start something that will bring that gang inside the law, and arrest the whole bunch on suspicion or what not. Anything to keep them from doing any mischief."

"But Mr. Ridgeway, sir, it is now, *now* while you are here that they are dangerous."

Mr. Ridgeway shook his head.

"Unfortunately not." He took a paper out of his pocket and handed it over to O'Brien. Lawrence looked over his shoulder and slowly spelled out the words of a curiously printed anonymous letter. It was written on heavy wrapping paper, and read:

"This is not a threat. It is simply to tell you what will happen. If the crown jewels that are lying in the Treasury Building and the papers in-

tended for a certain republic are taken out of this country, that day, mind you, the President of the United States will forfeit his life and so will you. You will remember this, because it is the truth. Make no mistakes."

O'Brien whistled. "So *that's* your little scheme, is it?" He pondered. "Of course it will be easy to take care of the president," he said. "And you will be safe up in the air, but no one knows what else they will do. I think it's up to O'Brien to get after them. Well, thanks to this lad, I know where to find most of the gang. When do you start?"

"I want to go tomorrow," said Mr. Ridgeway. "You see we have really two journeys to make; two errands to accomplish, and the sooner we do accomplish them, the better it will be. I will go from here to the White House and have my papers put in order, and have the custodian of the jewels ready with them tomorrow morning."

"Do you specially mind when you start?" asked O'Brien. "I wish you could set the time for evening. I want a whole day to get hold of my little family party. Even if I start tonight, it may take me that long."

"Not at all; not at all!" said Mr. Ridgeway. "It makes no difference, only you can see by this letter that those miscreants must be locked up."

"I will attend to that if I have to have a fight with them myself," said O'Brien.

"Then let us be going," said Mr. Ridgeway.

"Lawrence, do you want to come down as far as Pennsylvania Avenue and keep the car there for me?"

"Yes, indeed," said Lawrence.

When Mr. Ridgeway left the car a safe distance up the broad glittering avenue, Lawrence settled back and proceeded to enjoy himself. One of the most beautiful thoroughfares in the world stretched before him, and along it went representatives of every country and clime. He was intent on the pageant when a whining voice at his elbow recalled him to the present. A beggar, ragged, blear eyed, and out of place in the dazzling cleanness of the avenue, had shuffled up to the curb and was begging.

As Lawrence looked at the man, some strange picture in his brain, long forgotten and hideous, suddenly sprang into view. Where had he ever seen the face before him? Where had he heard that peculiar, deep, grating voice?

As he stared, the man looked him straight in the face for a minute and Lawrence saw a deep, three-cornered scar on the man's chin. On the spur of the moment he leaned down, and said:

"Moll certainly soaked you a good one, didn't she?" at the same time pointing to the scar.

The man leaped back with an oath. "Who are you?" he demanded, and then, "Moll's dead," he added.

"I know," said Lawrence.

"Who are you?" repeated the man.

"Snooks," said Lawrence.

"Dressed like that, sittin' in an auto?" cried the beggar. "You must 'a' found your folks!"

"No; I am driving for the man who owns this car," said Lawrence, his sense of caution keeping back the facts of the case. "I never found my folks."

"You want to advertise," said the man. "Tell you all I know about 'em for a dollar. Thanks! See that there Moll, she read about gettin' ransoms for folks and she hired out for nursemaid. I never knew who to. She didn't trust me, an' me married to her lawful! But one day 'bout sundown she sneaked in with two kids dressed dandy. And I ast her what was it she had, and she said, 'Oh, about two hundred thousand dollars.' I didn't like it, an' I said so, so she got mad and walked off with the two little beggars down toward the river.

"She told me afterwards. She took off the little fellers' shoes and stockin's. It was ragin' hot, midsummer; and she laid them on the bank with her own hat and their little bunnits, and then she let 'em paddle. They just could walk. How she told it, she just turned round, and there was one of 'em out in the current a-sinkin', and the other rollin' down the bank. She grabbed him, but the other had went; and she was so scared she comes runnin' home and there we was with another kid, which was you. Moll didn't go away nor nothin',

but we kep' close about it, because it might 'a' meant the chair. They found the bunnits, and nex' day or so they got the other kid's body. And the papers said Moll and the two kids was all drownded. But you wasn't drownded. And Moll used to say that woman in the pitcher Moll had in her bag would 've gave a million dollars to get a track of you, but we didn't darst do a thing. Besides," said the man, "there's a plenty of kids!"

"Can't you remember the name of the people?" asked Lawrence anxiously.

With a look of sly cunning, the man shook his head. "No, I don't remember. They don't want you by now, and you are all right. Let sleepin' dogs lay is my motter. I ain't goin' to put my head in no noose to oblige anybody. What they ever done for me, I say?"

"I won't tell on you," begged Lawrence.

The man looked around, then as he saw a procession of some sort moving gaily up the avenue, he said, "No, you don't get no chance. You are doin' well. Let sleepin' dogs lay," and dodged quickly across the line of the procession and was lost to sight, just a miserable human fragment on the tide of humanity.

Lawrence, his brain whirling, pressed a hand over the pocket containing the photograph.

"Oh, Pretty, Pretty!" he said in a whisper. "Are you my mother, dear?"

CHAPTER VIII

An hour passed, during which a whirling horde of hopes, ambitions and anticipations, not unmixed with fears, passed through Lawrence's mind. There was so much to hope for; so little to build on. It had been a long while since the day when Moll went down to the river with the two little children, the hapless babies whose tender little feet had been so rudely torn from the pleasant paths that Fate had set for them. Lawrence thought sadly of the little brother who had gone down in the sly and ruthless current of the Ohio River.

At first he could scarcely wait to share his news with Mr. Ridgeway; then the habits of a lifetime of self-dependence commenced to assert themselves. Mr. Ridgeway was involved in an adventure that might turn out to have a serious, indeed possibly a fatal outcome. Lawrence smiled. The knowledge that had come to him in such a strange and unexpected way seemed of more importance than all the crown jewels in the world. Jewels! . . .

Why, he had a chance at last for a name, for a home, for people of his own! The thought made him dizzier than any flight through the uncharted upper reaches of endless ether. Yet after all, the

affair did not touch his new employer and friend, and Lawrence doubted the wisdom of bothering him about it. It would be better, he finally decided, to wait until the job was over, and then hurry back to Louisville. It would be easy enough to find out from the records or old files of the papers when two little children and their nurse had been drowned. That was all that he needed to know. It made him wild to think that he had lived so many years, poor, cast-off, lonely, in the same city with his own people. That they might have left Louisville did not occur to Lawrence. He imagined them still there, still sadly and tenderly grieving for the lost babies.

Yes, he would wait! He would see the thing through himself. Then he would return to Mr. Ridgeway and tell him the glad news. Perhaps his mother and father would accompany him. But like a cloud came the thought, suppose in all the passing years death had overtaken father or mother, perhaps both?

Lawrence could scarcely endure the thought, and put it from him with a determined effort to let nothing mar his happiness. But all the more he decided he would keep it all locked in his own breast until the present task was well accomplished. He felt tenderly of the flat square in his pocket, the outline of the case holding the photograph. A warmth seemed to spread from it. No, she at least — mother, sister, some one, the owner of that lov-

ing and beautiful face — was waiting for him. On earth, living, he felt that some day he should greet her. He patted the case. "Oh, who are you, dear?" he whispered.

Mr. Ridgeway came rushing up and jumped into the machine.

"It is all set now!" he exclaimed. "Everything ready! Everything arranged! I have just sent one of the White House messengers with instructions to O'Brien. The man will return to my private secretary with O'Brien's personal receipt. I have also sent a telegram to the man in charge at Barnegat. I want you to drop me at the house and take the car up to your apartment. Have you a suitcase? Pack in it just what you will need while we are in the dirigible. When we get across, we will buy everything we need in the way of clothes. As soon as you get your things packed, come back and join me. We will spend the night quietly at home, and about four o'clock tomorrow morning we will go to the field, stuff the suitcases in one of the airplanes, and sail down to Barnegat. At dawn, O'Brien is to make a fuss around the field, and will start off with the dirigible that is there. If any chasing is to be done, those scoundrels will chase *him*. He is to have a good crew with him and is to follow our general direction but keep out of sight of us. We can pick him up by wireless any time. I don't believe there is a flaw in the whole thing!"

Lawrence agreed to this, and dropping Mr. Ridgeway went on to his apartment, where it took him about five minutes to pack. He was back at the house in no time, and soon in bed.

Little did either of them dream of the adventures befalling O'Brien. O'Brien, having read the letter of instructions from Mr. Ridgeway, buttoned the letter in an inside pocket. He then changed his coat and putting on a cap, took a car and went within walking distance of the disreputable flat building which housed the gang. O'Brien was going to pin all his hopes on what he would find in their rooms. He had changed his coat and had slung a small packet over his shoulder.

O'Brien was now a plumber! He entered the flat whistling, walked up an interminable number of stairs to the top floor, where Lawrence had tracked the two men. Here the whistling which had grown very low ceased entirely as O'Brien, putting an ear to the door, listened for sounds from within. Hearing nothing, he resumed the whistle and rapped gaily on the panel. There was no response and O'Brien repeated the knock. It was not late, but he feared that one or more of the gang might have taken that night of all nights to get some sleep. The silence continuing, O'Brien cast a keen glance around the small and sordid hallway.

Once more O'Brien turned his attention to the door. He slipped a skeleton key from his pocket

and noiselessly tried it. The door opened under his touch. O'Brien's manner changed. He was no longer the merry-eyed plumber, whistling as he came in a hurry call to tighten a leaky gas jet that threatened to snuff out some worthy without whom the country could doubtless stagger along. He became keen eyed and cat like. Slipping in, he closed and locked the door.

The room in which he stood had a ceiling cut into many angles and irregularities, and the front part of it was the inside of a tower or turret which formed the top ornamentation of the building. This part of the room alone had a flat ceiling, and in the center of it was something that looked like a small trap door. That too looked unused. In the back part of the room was a door leading into a back room. Out of this still another door opened into a dark passageway, and there was a steep flight of stairs. At the sight of the stairs O'Brien nodded. He meant to use those himself if he happened to be surprised while on his tour of inspection. He commenced to be sorry that he had not brought another detective with him. But hurrying back to the front room he commenced a careful search for the papers he was hoping to discover. There were but few places to put anything, and O'Brien's hopes went steadily down as he looked. All over the wall loose plaster hung or crumbled off as he brushed against it. He finished with the front room and went carefully over the back room,

where two cots and a deal table comprised the furnishings.

On the floor beside one of the cots stood a bottle almost full, and an empty glass. O'Brien picked up the bottle and smelled of it.

"The proper stuff for a nightcap," he said to himself and taking a small bottle out of his pocket, shook the contents into the larger bottle. "A druggist for a brother is a handy thing," he chuckled as he returned to the front room.

He stood irresolute for a moment, then looked up at the small square trap above him. A rickety table stood near one of the windows, and setting it under the trap he leaped lightly to its soiled top. The ceiling was very high, but he managed to reach up and shove the trap aside, and catching the ledge swung himself up.

O'Brien was no fairy, and it was a tight squeeze, but he wriggled through with no greater damage than a torn coat and a barked knuckle. Using his flashlight, he saw that he was in a small circular space about twelve feet across. The top was cone shape, and there was no floor. Dust lay inches deep on the rafters where he sat uncomfortably. Then he saw something that caused his heart to leap delightedly. Directly beside him, tied with a cord and covered with broken seals, lay a packet of papers. O'Brien knew that his hunt had not been in vain. Buttoning the papers carefully inside his coat, he put a leg down through the trap

when a sound below caused him to drag it quickly back and clap the trap over in its place.

A key grated in the lock. Someone was coming.

"An all night job for me!" sighed O'Brien, then remembered with a gleam of hope the powder he had added to the contents of the bottle. Changing his position, he stretched himself along a rafter, nearly losing his balance as he did so. But he managed to save himself from bursting through the plaster, although he heard it crack beneath the foot that had pressed on it for a moment.

"Who left the gas on?" said someone with an oath.

O'Brien recognized the gruff voice of Brown.

"Search me!" someone else answered, and another hastened to clear himself of the charge.

"It must have been John," said Brown. "Where is he? I thought he was right on our heels. He is no good at all. Wish someone would croak him!" He slammed the door, and came over to the table under the trap. A moment later one of the other men came into O'Brien's narrow range of vision, carrying the bottle and glass. He set it on the table, and looked at Brown.

"Leave it there for awhile. There is none too much in it. If Smith comes he will want most of it."

O'Brien's heart leaped. So they were expecting Smith! This was almost too good to be true. He grinned. He prayed that Smith *would* want most

of it. The fourth man came, but no one thought to ask him about the gas. Chairs creaked and the cheap cots groaned and squeaked as the men flung themselves down to rest. At the table, Brown, who was the only one within O'Brien's line of vision, took out a pencil and commenced to jot down something on a piece of paper. No one said anything. O'Brien sensed discord in the air, and a tense nervousness. It was clear from the very atmosphere that the four cutthroats hated each other cordially.

Almost an hour passed. Someone snored. Then a gentle tap sounded on the door, the sleeper awoke with a snort, someone opened the door, and there was a low murmur of greetings.

The mysterious Mr. Smith came over to the table and took Brown's chair. As he looked down O'Brien nearly groaned. A broad brimmed fedora was drawn down over the man's face, and O'Brien was unable to see a feature of the arch-plotter. But at least he could hear him talk.

It was evident that Smith was in a bad humor.

"Well, what have you to tell me?" he demanded in the silky, smooth tones that had irritated Lawrence.

"Nothing," said Brown. "Won't you have a drink?"

"Not yet, thank you," answered Smith politely. "Afterwards, perhaps. Where do you get this?"

"Downstairs," said Brown, who seemed to be the spokesman.

"Well, *I* have news and plenty of it," said Smith. "Not much longer will we have to eat our hearts out here. In an hour, two hours, I shall give you the best of news. Yes, indeed!" He nodded. "But first there is something for you to do, you over there, and you, Brown. I will sit here, perhaps comforting myself with this friendly bottle, while you take a taxi and bring O'Brien here."

"Bring O'Brien?" cried Brown.

The fedora nodded.

"Just that!"

"Why, he won't come! Where is he?" asked Brown.

"Either at the Ridgeway place or his own apartment. Oh, I have it all clear now, and O'Brien is in the thick of it. He is what you call the solution. He knows all. He is going to be made to tell. Won't come? Of *course* he will come! That is what you are for, Brown. A messenger from the White House gave him a letter tonight. Go and bring him here."

"He won't come easy," growled Brown.

Smith was angry. He brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"Bring him if you have to carry him!" he said in a low, hissing tone. And O'Brien, listening, knew why Lawrence had called him the Rattlesnake. Then with a muttered curse Smith swept

off his broad hat, and flinging it across the room, leaned back in his chair. Looking down full in the upturned face, O'Brien involuntarily gave a violent start. Instantly there was a crackle and a piece of plaster half the size of the turret came down with a crash. It missed hitting Smith by a hair and surrounded him with a cloud of dust, but he did not start. Instead, with the quickness of light, he flashed an automatic from his pocket, and covered the leg he saw lying along the beam above him. Then getting the direction of a man's body as the dust cleared, he aimed full at O'Brien's body and drawled, "Come down!"

"Sure!" said O'Brien obligingly. "The jig bein' up, I will that!"

He pushed the useless trap aside and swung down to the table, someone snatching off the bottle and glass as he did so.

They did not even make a move to seize him. The odds were too great in their favor. He jumped off the table and stood looking at the group of astonished villains, then his eyes turned back to Smith and sneered.

"I will say I never suspected *you!*" he said. "Of all the double-faced, low, lyin', sneakin' scoundrels, you are the worst!"

"Don't make your end harder than it needs to be," warned the man Smith. "Keep a civil tongue in your head and hand over your revolver. Search him, but don't kill him," he added, as O'Brien

struck out fiercely at the first man who moved toward him.

Someone in the rear flung a rope over his head and instantly his ankles were bound and a gag inserted between his lips. O'Brien realized that a struggle was worse than useless. He saw them take away the papers he had found up in the ceiling, and a moment later from the inner pocket came the precious letter from Mr. Ridgeway. O'Brien bitterly reflected that he should have destroyed it. Smith read his thought and laughed.

"Never, never carry important documents around with you," he said as he opened it and read the clear, concise instructions. Nodding, he placed it in his pocket. "Well, Brown, it wasn't so hard to get him here, was it? Is he securely tied?" He glanced at his watch.

"It is all clear now," he said. "Their dirigible is at Barnegat Inlet. It is not the one you have been looking after at all, Brown. They start tomorrow night with the papers and jewels, and O'Brien here is supposed to follow in the other dirigible. This he will use as a decoy, if we follow him. (It is too bad, O'Brien; too bad to spoil your fun!) Then if he succeeds in shaking us, he will follow them and pick them up soon as possible. So he will be able to see the finish; be in at the death, as they say. You will be *that* all right, O'Brien!"

He laughed a chill laugh: the rattles again, and

pulled out a cigarette which he lighted. O'Brien, watching, all at once recognized the brand and the monogram. But it was *not* an S.

"I am going now, to see that everything is ready for our flight. We will follow the dirigible straight out to sea, and ——"

"He hears, Excellency," said Brown. The word Excellency went unrebuked.

"Yes, he hears now, but it does not matter," said Smith. He went on talking. "We will follow the dirigible straight out to sea, and when we get close enough to the other side, just there where the white cliffs show up, we will begin shooting. There will be a fishing boat below filled with our men. We will get the telling shots before they doubt that O'Brien follows. That will be about all, except the division of the treasure."

"What are we going to do with O'Brien?" asked Brown.

"Oh, *him*," said Smith as though he had forgotten. "Oh, yes, to be sure." He opened the cigarette case, and from a slot in one side took out a hypodermic needle which he filled from a tiny vial.

"Shooting is too noisy," he said as he bent over his infernal little contraption. "And knifing is very untidy. Even here in this hole it won't do. Brown, you will come with me. Go at once to the hangar and see that the dirigible is in order, then keep out of sight. We have plenty of time. You three others, listen to me. All your safety and the

jewels themselves hinge on your obedience." He laid the hypodermic needle on the table, padding it round with his own handkerchief.

"Now listen. You will be interested too, O'Brien. I want plenty of time for an alibi, but not too much time. I want to start at dawn instead of tomorrow night, as dear Mr. O'Brien planned. It is now twelve o'clock. How the hours do fly when we are in pleasant company! At exactly three one of you will administer this little dose in the left forearm. Very soon the patient will show every sign of extreme intoxication, and you will then take off his bonds, hurry him downstairs and out into the street. Go around the block and into the alley. By that time you can ease him gently to the ground and leave him. Empty that bottle and put it in his pocket."

"He will yell," said one of the men.

"Not a sound!" the fiend said smoothly. "The first action of this admirable dose is complete paralysis of the vocal chords and the tongue. Really, O'Brien, it might be worse. It would be if I did not feel that caution is most necessary. There is no pain until the last. Only about half an hour, O'Brien. Sorry to cut you off, man, but you should not have chosen such a profession." He turned to Brown. "Come on!" he said, then as an afterthought to the three assassins, "Don't drink any of that stuff. You want all the wits you have. Good-bye, O'Brien!"

CHAPTER IX

As Smith and Brown closed the door gently behind them, the four men listened to the receding footsteps, then the three turned with one impulse and stared at the man lying bound and gagged on the cot. Although they studied him curiously, they found not a sign of flinching or of fear in the bright, steady eyes that looked at them over the bandage. Instead, he wriggled his shoulders in a derisive way.

"I must say," said the man who had lost at cards, "this job is not at all to my taste. I have killed before, but to bump a man off in cold blood and sit around waiting for it to come three o'clock to do it, I don't relish!"

"No other way out," said the short man. "Smith fixed that when he told him everything he knew. Now we can't let him go and save our own skins. He is too wise. I don't care, anyhow. Let him pass along! What's it to us?" He stared insolently at O'Brien, and the eyes smiled at him.

The third man, who had not spoken, shivered a little. "Let's have a drink," he suggested, going over to the table.

The fallen plaster puffed up under his feet as he went.

"You know Mr. Smith forbade it," said one of the others.

"I don't care!" said the first speaker. "How is he to know whether we have a drink or not? He was afraid of us getting full." He held up the bottle. "There is only enough for three good drinks in there, and I am cold." Again he looked at O'Brien and shivered. It was evident that the job of killing did not appeal to his taste. O'Brien held his eyes with a wild, revengeful look. Then again he moved his shoulders.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded the man. "Do you want to talk?"

"Don't ungag him," said the one they called John hastily. "One yip, and somebody would be up here."

"That's not what he wants," said the other, watching O'Brien. "The rope hurts him."

"What if it does?" demanded John. "It won't hurt him any after three o'clock. Leave him alone!"

"I am going to loosen that rope," said the other. "If *I* was going to die at three I would just as soon take a little comfort while I waited."

"Well, don't take the gag out," counseled John. "Here, I will fix him." He loosened the cord that held O'Brien's hands tightly bound behind his back, bent them in front of him and fastened them in

such a way that they were free unless he tried to reach his face. He could not quite touch the gag.

"Come on, let's have a drink," said the man who had advised it before.

"You heard!" warned John.

"I don't care *what* I heard!" said the man, almost whining. "I want a drink and I am going to *have* a drink! Didn't Smith tell us to put the empty bottle in his pocket?" He uncorked the bottle and gave it a little shake. The fumes were strong.

O'Brien, hoping, praying, watching, could see that the men, used to stiffening their grit with liquor, smelled the fiery stuff and weakened. Hoping, praying, watching, yet seemingly with nothing in his eyes but apprehension, O'Brien watched the three draw up to the table and commence to smoke. In the center between them the bottle sat, its cork out and the empty glass beside it.

"Well, if you are going to disobey orders," said John suddenly, "it is as well that we should be on the same boat. Are there any more glasses?"

"On the shelf there," replied another man, pointing. He grinned happily. "Smith is a fool. A glass apiece couldn't hurt a flea. Not a flea! And I am cold. I say we give him a little too." He nodded toward O'Brien.

O'Brien turned chilly himself. With his life hanging on the merest thread, he did not want to get a dose of drugged whiskey! But he nodded

his head violently, and looked as wistful as he could.

"There is not enough for four," said John coldly. "Perhaps where he is going there will be a drink ready for him."

He set the grimy glasses in a row and with great care poured out a portion for each. The division filled the glasses pretty well, and O'Brien wondered if there would be *four* dead men before the night ended.

One of the men looked at his watch.

"Two o'clock," he said. "What's the use of waiting? Let's give him the shot and take him down. I want to go to bed."

"*Bed?* What are you talking about?" demanded the other. "You have got to catch that four o'clock train for the dirigible."

"We have an alarm clock. We can get a little snooze. That is why I want to get this job done."

"That is why Smith told you to wait 'til three," said John. "Come, take your drink and have a smoke, and then it will soon be time to put our guest on his homeward way." He laughed evilly and lifted his glass. O'Brien noted with delight that his was the largest share. Drops of perspiration stood like beads on O'Brien's forehead as he lay there bound and gagged, waiting to see if the powder in the whiskey was going to work. What if it should taste and rouse suspicion in the breasts of the three villains? But the three drank down

their several potions without a blink. They did not follow it with water, but let the fiery liquid run down their leathern throats as though it was milk.

Then filling their pipes, they settled back in their chairs to await the hour set for O'Brien's death. For fifteen minutes they talked and laughed and quarrelled about the exact time of administering the poison. But John stood firm. Smith had said three o'clock, and not one moment earlier would he hear to. He yawned as he spoke, and yawns from the others answered him. Suddenly he looked up with a queer look of surprise on his face.

"I feel funny," he said. "Funny!"

The others sat staring at him.

John tipped forward in his chair. The others, still staring, slid backward and at once, it seemed, three heavy bodies swayed in their seats and slid to the floor. For a few moments the air seemed full of the sound of breathing rough and irregular; then slowly the breathing grew slower, deeper and more regular. It sounded like three great animals breathing together. They lay almost as they had fallen.

Painfully O'Brien raised himself to his elbow. He sat up. He could do no more as his feet were bound together. After a moment's thought, he lay back across the cot and commenced to slide toward the front edge. When his body was well off the edge he stiffened his neck and, carefully sliding

along, went to the floor without a thump. Sitting there, he wondered what he would do next. If there was one thing he wanted, it was to avoid making a noise that might alarm the people who were cheerfully quarreling in the flat below. Not yet was his own head out of the noose, and he wanted to get help so that he could have the three unconscious men arrested. But there he was, still bound and, worse still, gagged! At any moment Smith might return to see that his orders were being carried out. O'Brien knew Smith too well to hope that he would leave anything as important as his, O'Brien's, execution to an underling. Haste was of the greatest importance. O'Brien knew that his life would not be worth a penny if Smith should drop in on the group now assembled on the floor.

But O'Brien's arms were bound at the elbows and the gag covered all of his face except the twinkling eyes. Suddenly he had a thought. Beside John on the floor lay a box of safety matches where they had dropped when the owner fell from his chair. Reaching them with a series of wriggles, he succeeded in getting a match in his hand and striking it on the box. As the match flared up, he bent far back and held the flame close to the rope that bound his ankles and legs. Twisting his head painfully around, he saw that the scheme was working. The little flame for a moment bit into the strands of the rope. Another and another

O'Brien lighted and carefully guided to the rope. Once in awhile the match went out, and as O'Brien saw the supply giving out, his anxiety became more intense. Time was flying. It was almost three o'clock. There were still three matches. In the silence the breathing of the three men sounded loud and ominous.

Two matches burned out. For the twentieth time O'Brien strained at his bonds. He lighted the last match, held it close to the rope until it burned his fingers. Then he strained on the rope. Alas, it did not give! He jerked and twisted, and it seemed as though he could feel the fibres giving, yet they held. As he paused to rest, he saw a single match still clasped in John's fingers. Rolling over and over, with the empty box in his hand, he secured the match, lighted it, and held it carefully to the rope. It singed his ankle and burned his finger. Then once more he strained mightily. Once, and twice; at the third struggle the rope parted so suddenly that it unwrapped and spun out straight before him. His feet were free!

The loosening of the ropes around his ankles loosened one end of the rope that bound his elbows. A series of twists and wriggles and he slipped out of the coils and stood a free man once more. Tearing the gag from his mouth, he swallowed, and rubbed his bruised lips.

He was free! Free! And ten minutes before he had been as good as a dead man, his sentence

pronounced, his doom lying on the table. Hastily pocketing the hypodermic needle he picked up his hat and hurried out of the back door, locking it as he went. Carefully and noiselessly he slipped down the black, narrow stairs, feeling his way and not daring to use his flashlight. Every few steps he would stop and listen. He was shaken by the narrow escape he had just had, in spite of his coolness and courage. It was not pleasant to lie bound and gagged with what seemed to be certain death staring him brutally in the face. O'Brien was braver than most, but it had shaken him. As he collected himself, he was filled with a cold, still rage: rage against the men lying senseless above him, rage against the arch-plotter who called himself Smith. And O'Brien, thinking of the man and of the position he had seen him occupying for the past months, grew colder and more furious still.

Reaching the street, he hurried over to the nearest call box and sent in a demand for a patrol wagon and a half dozen officers. There was a station near, and almost immediately the wagon came tearing up. O'Brien was ready for them. Three senseless forms were hurriedly bundled into the wagon, a couple of officers were left to watch the entrance of the building, and O'Brien, taking a last look at the room to see that it was in the order that it would naturally be left in if the men had accomplished their purpose with him, hurried off.

It was four o'clock. O'Brien commenced to re-

alize that he was very tired. But his papers had been stolen, and the two most dangerous members of the gang were still at large. A hasty telephone to the house of Mr. Ridgeway was answered by one of the servants, who said that Mr. Ridgeway and his guest were not at home. The man could not or would not say more. O'Brien called the Aviation Field and learned from the night watchman that one of the planes was gone.

That was all he wanted to know. Hurriedly he secured a taxi and broke the speed laws in a mad dash for the Field. Arousing a couple of the best men, he opened the hangar where the dirigible, once more fit for any flight, swung lazily.

The men manoeuvered it into the open, O'Brien selected the two whom he wanted, and almost before they realized what they were doing, the big car rose into the inky blackness of the morning sky. O'Brien, at the wheel, steered a straight course for the hiding place of the dirigible Smith intended to use.

There was a glow in the sky as they approached, and as they paused over the field, they looked down on a burning mass of tumbled timbers that had been the hangar. O'Brien would have liked to know whether the dirigible had sailed up in the sky or gone up in smoke. He sped on, however, reaching Barnegat as the first streaks of day showed in the east.

There the hangar doors swung open; the dirigible

had gone. O'Brien straightened up and gave a quick glance over his big car. He knew that it was in the pink of condition, and his heart was glad, for he knew that the chase was on; a chase possibly to the death.

Somewhere ahead of him, out over the waste of waters that tossed and tumbled far below, the dirigible carrying Mr. Ridgeway, Lawrence, the state papers and the crown jewels, sailed swiftly. And behind it, instead of the guardian dirigible from their own Field and driven by O'Brien, another machine followed — a machine its very twin in looks and speed, but bearing a cutthroat crew.

O'Brien pressed a lever, shoving it far to the front, and the big machine answered with a burst of speed. His men, moving carefully about, were looking over every nut and screw and brake, and finding all in perfect condition.

O'Brien wondered how much of a start the other cars had. He did not think that he was far behind, so he settled to a good rate, and kept it, as mile after mile was left behind.

As the sun came up O'Brien was more and more conscious of an intense fatigue. Finally deciding that he would be needed most at the close of the race, he called one of his men, and directing him to keep up the speed and the direction indicated, he went back, and lying down on the floor of the tiny cabin went instantly to sleep. His jaw was sore, and every muscle ached. In his sleep he twitched

and tossed and muttered so that one of the men covered him with his own sheepskin coat, and at last he quieted down until the lines in his face smoothed out and he relaxed.

"It would be worth listening to, to hear what O'Brien has been doing these last few hours," said one of the airmen as they watched their chief.

"Some scrap, I'll bet!" said the other. "See his face? No bruises like a blow, but those two red welts stretching out from each corner of his mouth. I never saw that but once before, and that was on a man who had been gagged all night."

"They don't look pretty, do they? I'll bet he has been in some close corner. I'll bet he has been gagged."

"Well, Billy, I bet so too, so there are no takers," said the other airman.

"Well," said Billy, "if I had your pull with O'Brien, Hank, I would sort of bring the conversation around to scraps and gags and things of that sort when he wakes up, and see what he says."

"You don't know O'Brien very well, do you, Billy?" asked Hank. "Well, *I* do, and I can tell you that the first question some gazaboo puts about O'Brien's own private affairs, there will be another gagging episode and O'Brien won't be the one to worry about who is going to come and untie him. Not much!"

"Oh, I wasn't goin' to *ast* him anything," said Billy hastily.

CHAPTER X

While O'Brien slept and the two airmen speculated about him, far, far ahead two dirigibles flew straight into the rising sun. The first one might have outdistanced the second with the utmost ease. Indeed sometimes it was hard for her young pilot to temper his speed to the pace he knew the second balloon could make. The dirigible from Barnegat Inlet proved to be a wonder. It was a swallow, an arrow, a flash of light, a dream. All these terms and many more passed in turn through the mind of Lawrence as he held the wheel and felt the big cylinder respond to the slightest turn.

The lighter-than-air machines, while seemingly bulky, have a strange feeling of buoyancy that the planes do not possess. Lawrence seemed to partake of this lightness. He was happy beyond words. All was well. In his breast lay his new and wonderful secret. All the anxieties concerning the errand that had sent them overseas were past, with the treasure and the papers safely hidden.

Just in sight was another dirigible coming on at top speed. Lawrence kept it in sight, but was too anxious to proceed to allow the convoy to approach nearer. There was nothing that they

wanted to say to O'Brien, nothing that he could want of them. In case of accident — well, there were the waterproof suits that were guaranteed to uphold the wearer safely, warm and dry, for forty-eight hours. Suits capable of offering a cup of hot chocolate and a biscuit to the fortunate possessor! Lawrence almost wished that he could try his out! As for O'Brien, he had a wireless which he could use if necessary.

In the meantime everything moved smoothly and pleasantly. Lawrence, his hand on the pulse of the machine he was guiding, marvelled at the propelling power of the new fuel, hyolax, and rejoiced to think that he had been honored by the position he was occupying. His thoughts turned to Mr. Ridgeway with gratitude. He hoped his own father would be as pleasant and as good to him.

As for Mr. Ridgeway, for the first time in a good many days he was at ease. It is true that he had been worried at the failure of O'Brien to turn up at Barnegat but he had appeared so soon after their own start, hustling along dim and mysterious in the early dawn, that Mr. Ridgeway's last fears were silenced and he felt that the journey could assume the aspect of a pleasure trip, a vacation from care. He settled himself in an easy corner and sat looking out through the clouds that were rising about them from the sea. They were shot with rainbow tints as the rising sun pierced them. Mr. Ridgeway wished that his wife might

see them. He would have much to tell her when he saw her in the old English house where she was staying, utterly unconscious of the fact that her staid husband was literally flying to meet her!

Not a foreboding crossed his mind. The papers, carefully protected by wrappings of oiled silk, as well as the crown jewels, lay in a cleverly constructed cylinder under his feet.

This cylinder was an invention of his own. The size, weight, and shape were exactly identical with the cylinders that held the hyolax. There were ten of these cylinders lying side by side under a close grating that served as floor in that end of the cabin. Their polished steel sides gleamed prettily through the slats. They were made especially to fit the under curve of the boat-shaped cabin, and were ample to carry enough hyolax for three over-sea trips, but Mr. Ridgeway wanted no question of insufficient gas to worry him. But the end can held the treasure. With his own hands, under the eye of the Keeper at the Treasury, he had wrapped the priceless crown jewels in cotton, and had stored them in the big steel shell. Their individual boxes, cases, and caskets made of finest leather and carved oak and gold, were returned to the Treasury. Some other time they could be returned to their anxious royal owner. Now the only thing that mattered was the jewels themselves. Mr. Ridgeway smiled as he thought of the splendid glittering things. Never before in the world's history had

they been handled by any hands other than those of noblemen and women.

And here they were, their only guardian a man of the people, yet safe on their way home to their royal resting place.

So Mr. Ridgeway rested, his eyes on the east and his thoughts far ahead. Occasionally talking to Lawrence, reading or planning, he spent the daylight hours.

Behind came what seemed O'Brien's car, never gaining, but following steadily.

Staring steadily at the dirigible ahead, like a snake that fixes its baleful eyes on its prey to hypnotize and devour, Smith bent forward, tense and untiring. He had not slept for forty-eight hours, yet his pale eyes were clear and keen, his face, a little pale, was unlined by anxiety. Why should he be anxious? All was going well. He knew the very spot off the coast where the white cliffs rose so bleakly, the very place where even now the schooner would be waiting. All he needed was a little patience, just a little. Then he would send out the signal for help . . . and he knew Mr. Ridgeway. He would stop to help O'Brien, no matter how anxious to make speed on the last lap of the journey across the ocean.

There was but one thing, such a *little* thing, seemingly so unimportant. And this one thing, passing in a whispered conversation between O'Brien and Lawrence, he did not know. But

Lawrence remembered and put his knowledge to the test, and the result worried him. Again and again he made the manoeuver, so far to the right, back as far to the left, and a spurt ahead, but there was no sign of acknowledgment from the plane following.

O'Brien could not have forgotten. O'Brien never forgot *any*thing. Lawrence tried the manoeuver until he was afraid to repeat it, and like a star shell exploding in his brain came the thought, *"That is not O'Brien's car!"*

He took the glasses and studied the car. He could see by its quick tremor that the engines were being pressed to their utmost in order to keep up with their speedy leader, but otherwise there was nothing to make him think that O'Brien was not at the wheel. Yet he could not cast out the strange thought, "O'Brien is not there!" If not, who *was* in the car? Who was rushing it directly in their aerial wake? He hated to answer that question.

Surely if it was not O'Brien, there was reason for caution. And the only caution that now occurred to Lawrence was to keep ahead. Also he decided not to say anything about his suspicions to Mr. Ridgeway until something really serious occurred. And Lawrence hoped with all his might and main that his suspicions were all wrong. That seemed more than likely. Lawrence knew that his nerves were tuned up to the snapping point. He was suspicious of everything. Glancing over his

shoulder, he could see Mr. Ridgeway taking it easy. With an effort of will, Lawrence laughed his fears away. Yet every little while he looked back at the tiny object following them, and twice Lawrence slowed down his powerful engine until the car was in plain sight.

The second time he fancied that the other dirigible also slackened speed as though the pilot preferred not to lessen the distance between them.

Patiently Lawrence went through the secret manœuvers but there was no response. Either the car was not O'Brien's, or else O'Brien was never at the wheel. In either case, Lawrence found his anxiety growing.

There was no anxiety in the second dirigible. Smith was only conscious of a sense of annoyance to think that he was obliged to use the counterpart of O'Brien's dirigible instead of his own racing airplane.

He felt almost unable to brook the delay of the few hours that must pass before they saw the white cliffs of England. Yet he knew that even if he had had the plane it would have been most unwise to attack in mid-ocean, where Mr. Ridgeway would be forced to sink the papers and gems if the battle reached that end. He had not known Mr. Ridgeway so long without having to learn that in a question of honor he would sacrifice his life rather than fail in his trust.

Over and over again he mentally tested out every

small detail of his plot. Over and over he tried out his plans. There was but one flaw. Not one of the three men whom they had expected had appeared to take passage in the dirigible. Smith and Brown were alone. Where had John and the others been sidetracked? Not for a second did he doubt that they had obeyed him to the letter concerning O'Brien.

He chuckled as he thought of O'Brien. He was certainly a good man to have out of the way. There was something indeed snaky in the way Smith, holding the wheel with sure and practiced hands, allowed himself to dwell on O'Brien. How nearly the Irishman had come to tricking them all! If the plaster had held . . . but it had fallen, and so had O'Brien! All was well. Somewhere back in Washington, in a dark alley, a crumpled, dishevelled figure had already met the eyes of the first passerby. Smith chuckled again as he saw it with his mind's eye, and seemed to hear the stranger muttering "Drunk!" as he approached the tumbled figure that had been O'Brien. Then he lazily imagined the change in the man's expression as he stooped curiously over the fallen man and saw in the bruised and soiled face not the sodden look of liquor, but that ominous, austere mask that death and death alone draws over the human countenance. Running, stumbling, the passerby would dash for the nearest street, colliding perhaps with a policeman, yawning away the last of his night

beat. Then the quick return, the tap-tap-tap on the ringing pavement, and soon the rattle and clang of the city ambulance. But not before a crowd had gathered, one of the crowds that gather at any hour from everywhere and nowhere; curious, cold, morbid. And then the hasty shuffle through the fallen man's pockets, and the awestruck whisper between the policemen, "It's — it's O'Brien! O'Brien, the detective!"

Then how their manner would change! No common drunk this, lying crumpled in the filthy gutter. O'Brien was one of themselves. If it could happen to O'Brien, it might happen to one of them. Hastily, yet with utmost care, they would hunt for clues, for cuts, for bruises on the dead man, to find nothing, to come up against a blank wall. Doctor, lawyer, merchant, or thief, no one could find a mark on O'Brien that meant murder. And Smith knew they would look for murder. A blank wall! To save their own skins, Smith knew that John and the others would leave the hypodermic in an unrecognizable state far away from the scene of the crime. Yes, he could trust the three cutthroats he had left behind. Smith did not depreciate himself. He knew that he ruled his underlings by fear, a cold loathing that they could not understand or overcome.

Smith never made the mistake of underpaying his servants, so common to many criminals. No; if possible he always gave them rather more than

the shares they expected. So there was in everything he plotted the thrill of big rewards, of big profits. And they always knew that slip one word of rebellion, and for them, no matter where in the whole round world they might hide, sooner or later a shot out of the dark, a drop of poison in their cup would be the finish of the tale! Smith kept a clean slate.

These thoughts were pleasant ones for Smith as he steered his ship through the gentle currents of the upper air. He was glad that O'Brien was dead; he was glad that his eye was on the treasure boat ahead; he was not even sorry that the three men had missed their appointment with him. He knew that in an encounter such as lay ahead he and Brown would be perfectly capable of sending the dirigible ahead plunging down into the sea. And they would go down easily and quickly because of the fishing schooners that they would take for friends, and so let themselves down to the surface of the sea as soon as they could.

Smith really was enjoying a very cheerful journey. He kept the wheel until he was tired, then put Brown in the pilot's seat, and throwing himself down on a pile of rugs, lay looking up at the sky. Evening gathered around them like a cloak, and the stars, large and intimate, commenced to sparkle. He took the wheel long enough for Brown to set the lights properly. There were rules of the road even for these wayfarers in the sky —

really traffic rules that must be observed. Then he once more resigned the wheel to his henchman and went to look at the guns.

There were four of them, the latest model, rapid fire, small bore, any one of them throwing a bullet that would pierce a dirigible at the maximum distance of any shooting machine made. They cost a small fortune and had been secured by the syndicate of scoundrels who at that very moment were waiting so anxiously for the papers under Mr. Ridgeway's feet. Smith had personally seen to the mounting of them. Solid as the very wood and steel they were screwed to and blocked by, they pushed their wicked thin little noses up as though trying to look through the tarpaulins that covered them. When the dirigible had been anchored in the hangar outside of Washington, these guns had been concealed by seats that ran around the swinging cabin. These Smith had tossed aside, and they had afterwards been destroyed in the fire that had burned down the hangar. That this fire had occurred and that his own cigarette had started it, Smith did not know.

Once in a while something happened that Smith did *not* know, although he would not have admitted it.

Having looked the guns over, Smith went back to his rugs and, lying down, stared at the sky until sleep overcame him. He could afford to sleep. All was going well. At the wheel, like a big gray

wolf, Brown sat staring toward his prey through the deepening dusk. He could feel the soft cool shape of countless jewels dripping through his fingers. What did *he* care if they were stained with blood?

Brown also wondered a little about John and his friends. He could have told Smith that he was not altogether sure of the three precious scoundrels. He did not feel that they were quite as afraid of Smith at long range as they were when his pale, baleful eye was fixed on them. Brown could have told Smith that and more, but one was not invited to exchange confidences with Smith. That was his mistake. Brown did not doubt the death of O'Brien unless something had come up to put the three in danger. He knew that they were first, last and always intent on saving their own necks. Brown mistrusted them as much as they mistrusted Brown. And that was wholly. Yet it was funny they had not showed up when they knew that the jewels were to be secured on that very trip. They would have enjoyed the fight, would have enjoyed the first glance of all the flashing, glowing things in the cabin of the schooner. What indeed would *they* have cared that the gems were stained with blood?

CHAPTER XI

In the third dirigible, as the night dropped down the dead awoke! O'Brien stirred, rubbing his bruised face and working his stiff jaws. Other than the small discomfort of feeling that his countenance had been stepped on, he felt once more like himself, ready for anything.

"The top av the night to ye," said O'Brien briskly, sitting up. "Also Mizpah, Selah, Judah and the rest of them intertainin' east-side sayin's. I never did know was they a t'reat or a promise. Back when I was ridin' in the Mounted Police of Upper Canada, there was a felly always said . . . but that's neither here nor there." He checked himself. O'Brien never told stories of the North and its frozen trails although his friends spent hours trying to trick him into some of the hair-raising yarns that they knew he could tell if he only would. But no use. O'Brien was silent as the grave. *More* silent, some of the fellows grumbled. You could dig into a grave. Nothing could pry into or dynamite O'Brien.

"Have a good sleep?" asked Hank, looking wistfully at O'Brien's welted face.

"So-so," said O'Brien. "I dreamed. And it's

no time at all for dreamin'. What's gone on since I slept?"

"Nothing," Bill assured him. "She is sailing as smoothly as a swallow, and the lights ahead are steady."

"Oh, ye have 'em sighted, have ye? Did ye try creepin' up since night fell?"

"Yes," said Bill. "But we are making our best speed, and the balloon ahead is doing its best too. We can tell that through the glass by the way she shivers."

"Any sign of any other balloon?" asked O'Brien, rising and stretching himself.

"Not a sign!" said Hank.

"Well, what shootin' irons have ye?" demanded O'Brien next. He glanced at the two revolvers held out to him. "Two dear little pill-boxes, those! Carry wan foot. See these?"

He opened a case and disclosed four of the new model revolvers that had just been perfected. The design was unique. Instead of the steel cartridge clip holding six cartridges as in the old style revolver, the new invention consisted of a light case at the base of the hand grip. This held a coil of cartridges fastened by aluminum clips to a light webbing. This had necessitated the rehanging and rebalancing of the whole revolver, but the perfected weapon proved to be a great improvement on the old gun, and almost "fired itself," O'Brien explained. The small, round clip holder at the end

of the grip was not at all in the way and was so light that it was not cumbersome. Counting the six cartridges that were strung in the grip and the ones lying in the coil, the revolvers held eighteen shots. Also a new explosive called "Marsden," after its inventor, added a terrific force to the projectile. The barrels, longer than the squat model that had been so long in use, were octagonal.

O'Brien viewed them with pride.

"See me babies?" he purred. "The pretty pets! So neat and dainty and willin'! Willin' is no name! I'm not sure you couldn't nick that big sassy star over yonder, so be ye aimed straight. And I'm goin' to trust you with one each. Don't be afraid you can't shoot straight after usin' the old model, because ye can. These are hung exactly like the ould guns on that account. The man who invented 'em had a grain of sense. He saw no reason why everybody in the world should have to learn his shootin' all over again, so he balanced this new barrel and modelled the clutch so they would hang the same. All the difference is it's simply a new gun from stem to stern, and Marsden is a great felly himself. They do tell of him that when he was tryin' out his new explosive that he planted enough to go on a tin cent piece down a well, and sat a fuse, and now 'tis a bottomless pool with thousands payin' a nickel to just peek over the edge. It is sure wonderful. And no noise!

It is going to make scraps like the one I think is ahead both noiseless and orderly."

"Well, I should say these are beauties," exclaimed Hank, bending over the case with respectful tenderness. "Beauties; no less!"

"You have said the word, me boy," rejoined the detective. "Help yerselves to anny you like, they bein' as like as four peas, and pass one on to Ollie at the wheel, and tell the lad be careful of it. Here's the fourth and lasht for me; and I trust it means the same as a slice of bread."

"Slice of bread! How's that?" asked Hank.

"Did ye never hear now the great impartance of takin' the lasht slice uf bread on the plate? No? Dear, dear, how neglected ye've been! Ye've only to take the lasht slice of bread and ye are sure of a handsome wife. It's a thrue sayin' at that, because I could have had a handsome wife — yes, and a dozen of 'em — if only they would have consinted to marry me. It niver, *niver* fails! I'm a strong belaver in signs. I have missed havin' many and many a million dollars just by neglectin' to say, 'Money-money-money-wisht-I-had-a-million-dollars' when I saw a fallin' star. Else I'd be rich now!" O'Brien sighed and regarded the young men with eyes that twinkled. "Just where are we?" he asked after a slight pause.

The men told him.

"Good!" exclaimed O'Brien. "Dawn or thereabout will see us off the white cliffs of England;

and I've not seen Ireland for a dozen years. 'Twill be a small hop across the continent of Europe after we see the cliffs, and then we are due a vacation, I'm thinkin'."

All at once O'Brien's face changed.

"Boys, ye see the welts here and here?" he pointed to his face.

Bill and Hank felt a pleasurable shiver travel up and down their spines.

"Yes," they said together.

"Good!" said O'Brien. "They belong in another story quite. What I am tellin' you is this. I picked you back there because I think you are two bould lads wit' no fear in ye, havin' seen you do stunts of all sorts aloft and below; so if you think I have let you in for danger, take it that it was meant as a true tribute to your manhood."

Hank and Bill did not venture a reply. He was likely to stop right there. But he did not. He pointed out into the darkness of the east.

"Ahead," he said crisply, "sails the lowest, meanest, cruelest, sneakin' scoundrel that goes unhung! And he is stalkin' the finest, grandest, truest gentleman that ever served his country and his God wit' a whole heart. And here are we. And Mr. Hamilton Ridgeway,— for the first gentleman is him — thinks that it's meself trudgin' along behind. And the saints alone know what the demon in the middle machine thinks of us. Does the wireless work?"

"Perfectly!" answered Hank.

O'Brien frowned. "See that it is tuned up ready for instant use," he ordered. "I don't like to use it unless I am invited, but I've a hunch the man just ahead may want to ask me a question or two. If he calls, don't say a wurrud 'til I can get to the receiver. And keep your guns limber and your hearts willin', because it's the man ahead put me in a most embarrassin' position wit' a gag in me teeth and me arms and legs bound and a dose of poison yearnin' at me on the table. And that no later than lasht night. And bein' where he is, I know he means death and destruction to the finest man and the most promisin' boy in this wurruld. And he's after some written words meant for a dinky little locality across Europe which is sittin' up nights waitin' for 'em; likewise there's a quane next door like, who can't go to her son's comin'-out party without her crown jewels, the same which Mr. Ridgeway is takin' her, her husband havin' placed 'em in our Treasury durin' the war and it takin' him five years to get things cleaned up enough to get 'em home again.

"And that man ahead has his plans all laid. Bein' he thought I was well out of the way, he was careless with his instructions. He has laid the plan for his attack off the cliffs ahead, and I am afraid to have a fuss so far out as this because we are too far out of the track of steamers, should wan of us go down. Likewise, Mr. Ridgeway un-

doubtedly thinks I am ahead there. I wonder if we could reach him by wireless?"

"Wouldn't that give the alarm to the man ahead?" asked Hank anxiously.

"It might," said O'Brien. "I don't see what to do but keep watchin' and wait for day. I know Mr. Ridgeway has a balloon that can make double the speed of either of these boats, and sure he don't want to speak to me. So why should he bother to get in range with that felly? Of course he has guns, but how big I dunno. All we can do is watch."

Hank and Bill sat silent, thinking rapidly They were having thrills enough now. As O'Brien went forward to speak to Ollie, Hank dug a sharp elbow into his mate.

"Gosh, doesn't some people have all the luck?" he wailed. "Gagged and bound and 'most poisoned! All in one night! Just like a movie!"

Bill stared at him disgustedly. "Yes, you nut," he retorted, "and suppose he hadn't uv escaped? How would you like *that?*"

"But he did," said Hank. "Some people have *all* the luck! Cousin of mine was in the war, and he got gassed and shell shocked and had five shrapnel wounds, and one of 'em took the top of his head off, so he wears a silver plate and the gassin' took off all his hair so he wears a wig and his face is all smooth and shiny, and he has gold wire on his jaw where a piece of shrapnel broke it."

"Hully gee!" cried Bill. "You don't call that *luck*, do you?"

"Of course!" maintained Hank stoutly. "When anybody asts him, *he* always has something to talk about."

"Well, I'll say I will talk about the weather," said Bill. "I don't want any conversation whatsoever that has to be made out of pieces of me. I don't mind doing any job like the one we are on, and I was sore because I was too young to get into the war. I wouldn't have been afraid of anything, and you know it, but there's no use inviting trouble by wanting to make conversation out of it. I guess not!"

After a little O'Brien returned. "It looks like a fog was coming," he remarked. "I wish this English coast would clean up its fogs."

"We can get above it, can't we?" asked Bill.

"Not an English fog," said O'Brien. "The only place above an English fog is Heaven and the only place below it is deeper than I think of travelin'. I do hope we won't have anything like that to bother us."

The night dragged along, and the men anxiously watched the banks of vapor rolling around them. O'Brien insisted on Ollie and Hank and Bill taking a good nap while he, O'Brien, sat motionless at the wheel. He was leaving his next move to fate. Just how he should act his part he did not know. As he had told Hank and Bill, he was sure that the

speed of the car leading was the greatest protection that they could have or would need. And he remembered happily that he and Lawrence had settled on a signal which he was sure Lawrence had since tried out. If Lawrence only suspected that he was not in the car following, there would be no danger at all for Mr. Ridgeway.

O'Brien was glad the night was passing.

But the passing of the night brought only a shivery gray light as they rolled through billows of heavy fog. O'Brien, at the wheel, set the delicate tentaclever, the wonderful little instrument by which they were able to find the whereabouts of any other aircraft within a hundred miles. It at once caught the direction of the balloon ahead, and reported on its dial that there was no balloon following. So they had not passed one of the other balloons in the fog. They were within two hours' flight of the coast of England. A half hour passed and there occurred one of the strange freaks of a dense fog. It suddenly lifted, and ahead they saw the dirigible they were following and ahead of that, far, far away, the airship containing the treasure. A moment later the wireless commenced to hum and click. Hank and Bill and O'Brien reached it together.

O'Brien adjusted the receiver. The message ticked faintly.

"Something wrong with their machine or ours," said O'Brien anxiously.

Finally he got the words. "Who are you?" O'Brien sat staring. Then "John" he answered.

For a second it occurred to him to send out a call for help but he knew that Smith would only too gladly see his co-partners drop into the ocean and drown. So O'Brien sent the single name, and waited. There was no response.

"Why?" called O'Brien.

Still there was no reply. Then, "Something wrong with your wireless, John," came to him. "Can't make out anything you send. Take this if you can. Cliffs about two hours ahead. I am going to —" there was a buzzing and a flutter and dead silence.

O'Brien listened and called in vain. Something had gone wrong with the wireless. Once more baffled, O'Brien sent out call after call. There was no response. Once more Smith had escaped for O'Brien could not help thinking that the words he had been about to send would have made everything clear.

As O'Brien threw down the receiver with an exclamation of bitter disappointment the fog again drifted about them like a pall, and O'Brien, silent and bitter, took the wheel, and with his eyes on the indicator kept the balloon headed toward its invisible foe ahead. They were nearing the cliffs.

CHAPTER XII

"THERE are the cliffs!" said Mr. Ridgeway, pointing through the fog as it broke for a moment. "Sail high, Lawrence, as you approach the coast. As soon as you are over the cliffs, set your course to the southeast and keep straight on. We will reach our destination this afternoon, and tomorrow we will go on to our second stop, to return the papers." He gave a sigh.

"Well, we have escaped the thieves this time, Lawrence, and I *do* feel relieved! I am growing a little too old for this sort of thing. If I had been engaged in escaping bandits all my life, I suppose I would have an appetite for it. It must be the way some people like big doses of pepper in their food. But I am a peaceful man, and I would rather do 'most anything than go scooting around the world with a pack of hyenas on my trail. Perhaps if I had sons, a son like you, Lawrence, things would be different. Both Mrs. Ridgeway and myself would feel that there was more to live for. But the death of our sons sort of took the zest of living away from us. I have had to live for my wife and she for me. We never mention our loss. You must be careful of that, Lawrence. She cannot bear it even now. You noticed her picture in

the library, did you not? It is a good one, but I carry a better one with me." He undid his heavy leather coat and fumbled in an inside pocket just as the indicator announced that the wireless was working. Mr. Ridgeway buttoned his coat again, and turned to the wireless table.

"O'Brien is calling," he said.

Lawrence put a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Ridgeway, be sure that it *is* O'Brien, and not someone else," he begged. "I don't feel good about that ship behind there. I suppose it *is* O'Brien, but there is something that keeps telling me to be careful."

Mr. Ridgeway smiled. "I wish I had known before that you were anxious, my dear boy," he said. "The simplest way to settle that is to ask a question or two. We might have called yesterday and saved you the anxiety."

He took up the instrument and adjusted it. In a moment the message from the other ship commenced to flow smoothly in. O'Brien greeted his chief and asked for a little help. Before they passed over the cliffs, would Mr. Ridgeway please slow down and allow him to come up? He could not make the speed that the Barnegat airship could make. Indeed he was straining his engine to keep in sight.

Mr. Ridgeway agreed to do as O'Brien asked. He hoped there was nothing wrong with O'Brien's engine. Nothing serious, came the reply.

"Is anyone following?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"Yes," answered the wireless. "We are followed by another dirigible. I suppose Smith is driving it, but they are far behind and cannot catch up before you cross England. They think they are following you. I will lead them toward the north as soon as we are well over the land."

"That is satisfactory," answered Mr. Ridgeway.

"Ask him why he didn't answer my signal," prompted Lawrence.

"Why didn't you answer the signal Lawrence sent out yesterday?" asked Mr. Ridgeway.

"Too busy," came the answer. "This engine was off all day, and we were working on it all the time."

"See?" said Mr. Ridgeway. "That is all right. The signal was nothing important, was it?"

"I suppose not," said Lawrence. "But can't you ask him something or other that only O'Brien would know?"

Mr. Ridgeway laughed. "You *are* a suspicious kid all right, aren't you? Well, here is something no one but O'Brien and myself and one other person, a very distinguished person indeed, could possibly know. I will ask him about the letter from the White House."

He turned to the instrument.

"O'Brien," he asked, "Lawrence wants something as evidence that you are really there. He seems to doubt his senses. Just tell me if there

was anything peculiar about the paper I wrote my instructions on."

"Lawrence won't have any doubts about *anything* when I see him," flashed back. "Yes, I remember the paper. It was the private stationery of the President and instead of signing your name, it was signed with your private seal, the carved seal you always carry on a chain under your waistcoat."

"O.K." answered Mr. Ridgeway. "I think that is clear enough. We will slow down immediately. Keep to the right. We cannot see you in this fog. It is getting thicker as we go in. I can't afford any accident now."

"All right!" came the answer.

Mr. Ridgeway turned to Lawrence. "I think that ought to satisfy you, my boy. O'Brien received my message written in the President's private study on his private paper and sealed with this seal. It never leaves me and cannot be duplicated. There are secret lines in the carving, as delicate as the lines on a bank note. Oh, it is O'Brien all right! And he says that Smith is behind, but evidently following him. Just as we planned every bit of it."

Lawrence gave a sigh of relief.

"I am certainly glad," he said. "I don't know what made me so suspicious."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied now," replied Mr. Ridgeway, laughing.

"I am," said Lawrence slowly; "but I know I am *not*."

Mr. Ridgeway slapped him on the back. "What a boy!" he exclaimed. "Within an hour at most O'Brien will be laughing at you, and I will, too. I wish this fog would lift. It is dangerous for two balloons the size of these to approach when they cannot see to manoeuver. However, we are all right. Unless it is absolutely necessary to borrow something for his engine, O'Brien will not try to board us. We can swing him almost anything he wants."

"I can hear him coming now. There *is* something wrong! The engine on that ship never made a noise like that."

Lawrence listened, and wondered dully if it was O'Brien's car, but he did not care to be laughed at, so kept silence, only asking, "Shall I take the wheel?"

"Perhaps you had better," said Mr. Ridgeway, "and when the cars come together allow for the wind. It is blowing from the north, and I told O'Brien to keep to the right as he came up. Coming on the left, we might be blown together and entangled. So allow for that and keep pretty well away until we know what he wants."

Lawrence went to the wheel and settled himself for a pretty piece of airmanship. He too could hear the pulsation of the engine behind them. It sounded choked and muffled in the fog, which was

now so thick that objects five feet away looked hazy.

More and more distinct came the sound behind, and suddenly like a phantom the dirigible appeared. Mr. Ridgeway gave a shout of surprise and anger as the balloon, instead of following his directions, slid close to them on the left. The cars bumped violently, and two muffled figures rapidly lashed them together fore and aft. They had had the ropes ready and it took but a moment to secure them.

Then, almost before Mr. Ridgeway realized his predicament, he and the two men who comprised the crew found themselves looking into the muzzles of the revolvers held by their strange visitors.

"Hands up!" said a smooth voice which Lawrence recognized as that of their arch enemy. "No fooling! We intended to shoot you all, but if you give up the jewels and papers, Mr. Ridgeway, you may save your life and that of the boy over there. Keep that wheel steady," he ordered, "or I shoot!"

He turned to Mr. Ridgeway. "If the papers and jewels are in my hands in two minutes, you are safe. Otherwise down into the sea you will go. However, perhaps it will be as well to wait until I hear my men coming up. There is a dirigible behind, with the rest of my men. The dirigible is the one O'Brien was going to take. O'Brien is dead, by the way."

Under the air mask Smith grinned.

"Who are you anyway?" demanded Mr. Ridgeway.

The man laid one of his revolvers down and tore off his mask. Mr. Ridgeway looked at the smooth, smiling face and staggered backward.

"My private secretary!" he gasped.

"Nicely done, wasn't it, Mr. Ridgeway? I don't at all blame you for trusting me. I brought such wonderful recommendations!" The fiend chuckled. "Indeed, kings themselves have trusted me before this. However much as I might desire to talk over old times with you, I will ask you to tell me where the jewels are."

Then before Mr. Ridgeway could answer, his face lighted.

"Ah, an inspiration!" he said. "No need at all for unwilling disclosures. We will just change ships. Why did I not think of that before? Brown, just escort those mechanics over the side into our car, then tie them for the present and fix the guns. We won't want to trouble our friends with the care of the little beauties. You know what to do, Brown." He listened. "No sound yet," he said, and as the men went over the side, he turned to look at them.

Silently in that moment when Smith's eyes were following the movements of Brown and his two prisoners, Lawrence stole a hand along the side of the ship and grasped a fine cord that hung within his reach. He gave a quick pull and heard aloft in

the fog a little sound which he instantly disguised by a flood of hyolax in the carbureter. The engine sputtered furiously but Smith only glanced at him idly, thinking that fright had deprived him of his common sense.

Mr. Ridgeway had followed Lawrence's quick action, however, and he hung back as Mr. Smith with a wave of his revolver indicated that he too was to follow over the side into the other ship.

"Look here, Van Arsdale," he said quietly, "I don't see why we can't talk this thing over. You have the upper hand certainly. Name your price, and let us keep the jewels. Name your price, and although it is a crime to do it, I will give you a certified check for your money. You know I always have certified checks with me."

Van Arsdale pondered. "I don't know but there is a good deal to that, Mr. Ridgeway. I know just how you feel. You want it said that you were a trustworthy custodian. And as far as I go, I would rather handle cash than bother trying to have a bushel of old diamonds and rubies recut and marketed. As for the papers, they must have a price of their own because in giving them up, I relinquish my hopes of greatness for awhile and will have to think up some other scheme to attain my ends. So, Mr. Ridgeway, what do you offer?"

"A million," said Mr. Ridgeway.

"Pounds or dollars?" asked Van Arsdale.

"Dollars," replied Mr. Ridgeway.

"Not enough!" said Van Arsdale. "Dear Mr. Ridgeway, we have discussed the value of the jewels so often, you and I, when I was your trusted secretary. A million won't do at all. Come, bid up! What am I offered?"

"Two millions for the jewels and papers," said Mr. Ridgeway. "I can't go higher."

"Three or nothing," said Van Arsdale sullenly. "I will take three, and I want it before those fellows come up. They expect the jewels, and they would murder anybody for cash."

"All right," said Mr. Ridgeway.

Lawrence saw that he was deadly pale and his hand shook. "This cleans me out, Van Arsdale." He took a check book and fountain pen from his pocket and commenced to write. Van Arsdale stepped up to him and looked over his shoulder. Instantly Lawrence jerked the cord again, and silently in the wet fog a sort of claw with a razor edge on it fell in his lap. He shoved it hastily out of sight just as Van Arsdale looked up and asked: "What makes this boat list so?"

"Because you are tied up to us," answered Mr. Ridgeway, quickly. "There is your check, Van Arsdale, and I hope I can get even with you some day!"

"I wish you all the success in the world!" laughed the plotter. "I do advise you as a friend to keep out of my path."

He called sharply and Brown, who had secured the two men, stepped over the side and approached his master.

"Tie the wheel, and toss that boy over!" he ordered.

"Into the sea, Excellency?" asked Brown.

"No, idiot; into the other ship! No, take this man first!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Ridgeway. "You have your money. Put up those guns and get out! A bargain is a bargain, and I suppose there is honor even among thieves."

"Among *some* thieves, no doubt," said Van Arsdale, smiling his snaky smile. "Also there is another motto. *Business is business.* It was a good touch to get the three million as well as the jewels and papers, was it not? Yes, it has been quite an education to be with you, Mr. Ridgeway. In my place, you would at once retire and allow me to proceed on my way. But you see there are some brave fellows following who look to me for their daily bread, their all. They will not like it when they find you have not gone down to feed the fishes, but never mind. You know how tender-hearted I am.

"Even about O'Brien. I don't mind telling you that I had three ways of detaining him, and I chose the least painful one. Come, Mr. Ridgeway, over the side at once. That boy over there can follow

you. He is no good. This ship is listing more all the time. Come, come! I want to true up the engine."

He took a step toward Mr. Ridgeway, his two revolvers still levelled. Like a flash, Mr. Ridgeway hurled the wireless table full at his captor. Instantly both revolvers went off wild, and Brown, seizing a heavy hyolax case, brought it down on Mr. Ridgeway's head. If it had struck him squarely, it would have killed him, but Lawrence, springing forward, had been just in time to seize Brown's arm and the blow glanced. Even then Mr. Ridgeway dropped without a sound and lay as though dead.

Brown had seized Lawrence, and as he held him in a rough grip the sound of an approaching dirigible was heard through the fog.

"Lemme drop them overboard, Excellency, and cut loose and go!"

"No! I do owe something for the three millions, Brown," said Van Arsdale. "Think what a nice division that is going to make! By rights it is all mine, but I am not small; I will divide. Here come our men. Hoist Ridgeway over the side into the other boat. Don't try any funny work! If he goes into the sea, so do you. He shall have his life in exchange for the money. You cub, you get over there! If my men come up, I will have hard work saving your precious young neck!" He lifted Lawrence and tossed him over with little

ceremony, as Brown tumbled the unconscious figure of Mr. Ridgeway into the other ship.

"Now get out!" said Van Arsdale to Lawrence. "If you can steer get out as fast as you can! The dirigible behind is armored and armed like a battleship. And they won't waste sympathy on *you!*" He cut the ropes between the two ships and turned toward the wheel, shoving his revolvers into his pockets.

Lawrence watched him as the two ships sheered off, then as he heard the exhaust of the approaching ship bearing its load of cutthroats Lawrence realized that their chances of life were dwindling. Nothing mattered except to let Van Arsdale know that they were not afraid even at the moment of death.

He leaned over the edge, and as the car sheered off a little, he yelled derisively like a street urchin, "Say, mister, your bag is leaking and pointed upward!"

Van Arsdale looked. Slowly, very slowly, the big bag was collapsing.

CHAPTER XIII

With an execration Van Arsdale fired. But in the second that it took to aim at the grinning lad, Lawrence had disappeared. Lying flat on the floor, he wriggled over toward the wheel which he found lashed in position. The ship, drifting about, commenced to wobble. Second by second Lawrence waited for the shots that would put the bag above him in a worse condition than the one he had just fixed. He could not doubt that they were doomed. He knew very well that even when offering them a chance for life Van Arsdale had fully intended to let them get away and then shoot up the ship and drown them all. But now he could see through the open slat left for sweeping off the deck that Van Arsdale was trying to keep the dirigible up until reinforcements should come. And in a minute or two Lawrence knew by the sound of the engine they would hail them.

Many thoughts passed through his mind as he lay there waiting to hear the first shot clip through the billowing silk above him.

His first thought was a heart-breaking one. He would never know his own people, never feel the touch of his mother's soft and loving cheek against

his own! Bitterly he regretted that he had not told Mr. Ridgeway the whole thing.

He could not make himself believe that Mr. Ridgeway too was doomed. He wanted Mr. Ridgeway or someone to take a message to the dear ones he so longed for. He wanted them to know that the son so long lost loved them and had built his young life out of the best he had, for their sakes. Mr. Ridgeway lay motionless, and the roar of the approaching engine sounded loud in Lawrence's ears. In a moment he heard it close in on the other side of their dirigible and shouts sounded. Unable to withstand his curiosity, Lawrence popped his head above the bulwark and witnessed a most amazing thing.

As the newcomer broke through the fog and swung to the left, a burly figure hanging over the bulwark swept the tableau through his goggles. It was astonishing enough. On the right was the big dirigible with the punctured gas bag struggling with all the might of its powerful engine to keep in the air.

Brown had already mounted the network and was trying to stop the leak.

At the wheel stood Smith, a smile frozen on his face as he swept his eyes over the newcomers. Even with all their coats and wrappings, he knew that John and the others were not there.

The newcomer saw the figure of Mr. Ridgeway lying in the bottom of the ship nearest; he saw the

boy wigwag frantically from the bottom; he saw the two bound and gagged mechanicians.

He uttered an imprecation, and leaping lightly into the middle ship called to his men as he did so. Then hauling out his revolver, he made another leap which landed him in front of Van Arsdale. As he landed, he tore off his mask and goggles and stripped off the heavy leather coat.

"Ye lyin', stealin', murderin' villain!" he shouted. "I won't defile me new pistol on ye! Fight! Fight, can ye? Fer I'm goin' to slay ye wit' me own hands!"

As he made a lunge for Van Arsdale, the man attempted to shoot, but the weapon was dashed from his hand.

This much Lawrence saw, then he found there was something else for him to do besides watch the maddened O'Brien rushing his snaky adversary, as the balloon almost imperceptibly settled into the fog. The machine he was in was reeling around as the wheel turned and the rudder swung to and fro. Lawrence trued it and lashed the wheel. Then he shouted an order to Hank and Bill who were on the point of following their leader with their new guns in hand. Hank sprang for the wheel with an order to Ollie. Quickly the dirigible rounded the bow of the middle ship, and dipping a little, lashed fast to the sinking balloon and held it steady. Hank drew a bead on Brown, still clinging to the ropes on the side of the gas bag, and ordered him down.

In the meantime, Lawrence was ripping the gags out of the mouths of the two men but he could not free them as the anklets and handcuffs were locked on, and he did not know where to look for the key. He tried only for a moment, for Mr. Ridgeway claimed his attention. Dashing some water over his set and pallid face, he was relieved to see the eyelids quiver, and a broken sigh well up from the sunken chest.

His friend and benefactor would live!

Panting cries and gurgles sounded from the collapsed dirigible, and Lawrence looked over upon a terrific encounter. Both Van Arsdale and O'Brien were large men, O'Brien stocky and full muscled, Van Arsdale built pantherlike and slim.

Van Arsdale fought with the surprise that one so low as a mere detective should raise a hand against him and with a furious resolve to punish, mangle and kill his opponent.

But something deadlier, colder and deeper stirred in O'Brien's blood. He remembered his own death sentence on the lips of this man now delivered into his hands. He could hear the smooth voice say, "It will not be painful, only for half an hour, O'Brien!" O'Brien wondered as he lunged out at his enemy, delivering slashing blows, he wondered how many men and boys and indeed women had gone down to death by his hand or by his orders.

Hunk, clinging to the ropes and trying to watch Brown as he came slowly down, saw the conflict out

of the corner of his eye, and muttered, "Some folks has all the luck! I bet one of 'em get killed!"

As O'Brien delivered a terrific blow and Van Arsdale reeled back against the rail, O'Brien looked him in the eye.

"Come on, you snake!" he gritted. "No quarter! I'll make you pay for what you did to me. You lily-fingered murderer, you! See if you can fight a white man's way!"

Van Arsdale sprang forward, murder in his eye. O'Brien read it there and laughed a laugh that was like the flick of a whip across the face of the man before him.

It was not O'Brien's first fist-fight. Many and many the time he had encountered men his equal in size and strength on the mat, but in the long nights in the frozen north O'Brien had met men of many kinds and races, and his joyful laugh and ready wit and square open nature had made him many friends. From one and another he had learned tricks worth remembering: the feint, the unexpected stoop, the rush and instant withdrawal.

And as the struggle went on up there far above the sea, jewels worth a king's ransom under their scuffling feet, the fog close about them, the punctured bag doubling and flopping overhead, and here and there the small steel muzzles that yearned to speak their short, sudden summons of death, as they fought on and on it became apparent that at last O'Brien had met his match.

He could despise Van Arsdale, could hate him, but O'Brien had to acknowledge that the man could fight. O'Brien was rushing. All his fighting was offensive. Van Arsdale, on the defensive, parried and sidestepped O'Brien's bull-like rushes.

O'Brien couldn't rid himself of the idea that Van Arsdale was fighting for time. It puzzled the detective, but with the one idea of administering a drubbing that would forever mark his cold and handsome adversary O'Brien fought on while the fog slowly cleared and the dirigible hung low between the supporting ships.

The little wind that had been blowing from the north grew suddenly stronger, and as a curtain rolls up and is forgotten, so the thick fog disappeared and left the strange group swinging over the sea that washed the white cliffs of England. They shone in the morning sunlight, and on the gray sea beneath a schooner rocked lazily.

Van Arsdale, buffeted against the rail by one of O'Brien's sledge-hammer blows, saw the schooner and his heart leaped. He knew that the two ships supporting the dirigible in which they were fighting were slowly seeking a lower level. It was not a killing height from the sea if he could manage to hit the water right. O'Brien, hammering one blow after another, was punishing him badly, but he was also returning enough blows to keep O'Brien from landing a knockout. Once in awhile O'Brien would land a slashing blow on his face. He felt the bridge

of his nose crack under a terrific slam, and a moment later it crashed in. One eye was closing. Again, in a moment when both rested for breath, Van Arsdale measured the distance to the sea. He knew the schooner would pick him up, and safe in his pocket rested the check for three million dollars.

He was growing tired. O'Brien rushed him again and with the quickness of light Van Arsdale slipped his left hand in his breast. There was a narrow silvery flash as the hand lifted and came down straight for O'Brien's heart. Van Arsdale knew where to strike and knew he could not miss as he leaned lightly forward. He had meant this ending but somehow could not bring it about sooner. The knife descended in a true path, but something happened. Eyes as quick as Van Arsdale's own watched under O'Brien's set brows, and with a leap he writhed aside. The razor-edged blade slid through the slack of his coat, and instantly O'Brien had clasped his man in the Indian wrestler's grip.

There was a moment of mighty effort, when the trained muscles gathered and tightened to their task. Then all at once the watcher there heard a strange crackling snap, as Van Arsdale was lifted high over O'Brien's head and went whirling down, and down, and down, a limp and grotesque figure that met the tumbled sea and disappeared beneath the waves forever.

There was a long silence while O'Brien leaned

panting against the rail and the others strained their fascinated eyes to see if Van Arsdale's body would appear. But there was no break on the surface of the sea. Only Hank found his voice. For want of a better listener he addressed Brown. Prodding him recklessly with the muzzle of his new automatic, he demanded, "Didn't I say so? Sure I did!"

But Brown made no reply. A man who can feel the exact shape of a gun muzzle against his third rib never feels in the mood for bandying words. He stood quite still. Brown knew that for him the end had come. He lowered his wolfish head and cringed. Even when they put him in irons he did not speak.

O'Brien was the first to collect himself. He opened his coat, and parting the slashed cloth traced the course of a clean-cut scratch that commenced at the left breast and curved downward for twelve inches. He turned and showed it to Hank and Bill. A trickle of blood marked its course.

"Gee!" said Bill.

"That's going to leave a scar," said Hank hopefully.

"Naw, it won't!" Bill retorted.

"It will if he rubs salt in it," said Hank.

"Well, what in time would he do that for?" the much-tried Bill wanted to know.

"Why, salt is an epidemic," said Hank. "Best thing in the world!"

"Whadder you mean: *epidemic?*" demanded Bill.

"He means antiseptic, I suppose," smiled O'Brien, almost too tired and blown to talk.

"Yes, antiseptic, or epidemic, all the same thing," Bill replied. "Stuff to rub on a sore spot, and she gets well. If you don't, piff! you get blood poison and swell up, and swell up till you die." He grew silent, seeming to gloat over the picture of swelling up and swelling up. Then "Turrible!" he said.

"Well, I won't swell up unless we have let Mr. Ridgeway die while we were settling things with Smith. Get over there, you two, and lay him down on the rugs."

The two young men leaped back and, followed rather stiffly by O'Brien, found Mr. Ridgeway lying with open eyes, while Lawrence laid cloths soaked in cold water on his head. He looked very ill, and O'Brien was frightened when he saw his condition. Lifting him gently, he examined the bruise made by the blow, then went to attend a little to his own hurt.

"About a millionth of a inch more and he would uv croaked him," Hank assured Bill in an undertone as they brought cushions and tucked them around the injured man.

Bill merely glared.

"I never saw anybody like you in this world!" he said finally.

"All right," said Hank. "Say it all you please, but I don't see as anybody has thought of what *I* am a-goin' to do *next,* and it's what he needs worst of all."

He vaulted over into the ship they had come in, and disappeared into the tiny cabin. In a few minutes he appeared with a covered basket. This in hand, he went back to Mr. Ridgeway and knelt beside him. Uncovering the basket, he took out a pot of tea, boiling hot, and a couple of slices of toast. Mr. Ridgeway tasted it languidly, then drank with relish as the hot liquid warmed his chilled frame.

"I never tasted anything quite so good," he said as he finished his second cup. "You had better pass some of that to O'Brien, young man. I never did know before how good tea could be."

Hank returned to the cabin with his basket and a jeer for Bill.

O'Brien, scorning the "epidemic," had bound up the scratch and now commenced to manoeuver the three planes in toward the cliffs. The punctured bag hung heavy between the others, but he thought he could manage to clear the rocks and drop the useless dirigible on the plain beyond. Mr. Ridgeway insisted on going on with the papers and jewels, and suggested to O'Brien that he should give him Hank and Bill, while he could stay to see to the dirigible and have Brown placed in prison.

Also the two men who were still wearing their iron bracelets and anklets were clamoring loudly for release.

Brown, the prisoner, kept an unbroken silence.

After trying in vain to make Mr. Ridgeway wait over or let O'Brien go in his place, everything was settled in the way stated and the slow aerial procession made its way to the top of the cliffs or over them, and carefully led the broken dirigible, with O'Brien, Brown, the two manacled mechanicians and Ollie in the other balloon.

As Bill skillfully propelled their machine up into the higher currents, Lawrence looked at the cylinder which had been lifted into their machine, and marveled that it could make so much trouble. However, once more they were safe, he was lying beside Mr. Ridgeway, and a wave of love seemed to flood him. Lawrence wondered if he could ever care so much for his own father back there in the States.

It was a clear and sunny day; not a cloud in the sky; not a cross current to bother them. Almost mid-day indeed, yet Lawrence, dead tired, dropped asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

LAWRENCE slept for hours. When at last he awoke he saw that they were circling above a large city bright with flags and bunting.

"Getting dolled up for the Prince's coming-out party," Hank said as he leaned far over and levelled the glasses on the brilliant broad streets below. Throngs of people passed to and fro, and one and all stared upward at the dirigible as it came slowly downward. Not until they had located a beautiful villa nestling among the trees of a vast park on the outskirts of the city did Mr. Ridgeway give the order to descend. A mile from the villa there was a large aviation field and there they landed. A delegation approached composed entirely of admirals, or so it seemed to Hank and Bill and Lawrence, so loaded with gold braid were they and so overtopped with plumes.

Mr. Ridgeway showed no nervousness at all and entered a big automobile, while Hank and Bill lifted in the big hyolax case and sat themselves down on either side of it as a sort of guard. They were still in their aviation clothes, which Mr. Ridgeway said would be considered a uniform. As they started off, another company of admirals de-

ployed around a corner, overtook them on the run, and trotted along on all sides of the car, which was forced to proceed at a crawl. Sitting on the back seat with Lawrence, Mr. Ridgeway looked stern enough to quell any number of admirals. The bandage under his hat was commented on frequently in a tongue the boys had never before heard. It was a short ride to the gates of the great park, and there another automobile was waiting, with another guard. These seemed to be the "pick of the whole b'ilin'," as Hank said, for the admirals were in pale blue uniforms and were a head taller than the others.

Here Mr. Ridgeway, after seeing that the cylinder was placed on the seat in front of him, took out his automatic and rested it across his knees.

The boys were to wait for him at the gates. A number of the pale-blue soldiers mounted the running boards and hung on behind; the others closed in on either side and the car moved slowly out of sight, while the guardian closed the center leaves of the gates, leaving only a smaller gate open at either side.

Hank leaned back and sighed.

"Well, *don't* that beat you?" he said. "Wish we could go up and see what the queen looks like. I bet she is nifty lookin'. Nuthin' to do but load on the jewelry, and try on crowns.

"We have had some awful democratic, commonplace kings and queens back in Washington last few

years, but I bet that's all put on. They want to put it over on us; make a hit with the unions and all that when they come visitin'; but I bet when they are home it's different. Now that prince the party is for: it's his coming-of-age party, Mr. Ridgeway said."

"Yes, but even that is different," said Bill. "Mr. Ridgeway told me the heir to the throne here in this country is of age when he is fifteen. That's so if anything should happen to the king, the boy could go right to kinging it without any lawyers having to be hired to make out papers."

"Fifteen, eh?" mused Hank. "I'd like to see him now. I seen a picture in the Corcoran Art Gallery. It was named *The Young Prince*. He was all of that, I will say; with a long blanket like around him, and ribbons on his golf pants and a hat all feathers."

"Oh, you make me tired!" said Bill. "I seen that pitcher myself. That guy was born way back — back before the Cuban war."

A violent discussion seemed started, but a diversion was made by the sudden appearance of a bareheaded lad on a shabby bicycle. He came tearing through the small gate, saw the automobile drawn up at the side of the road in the shade, checked his pace, and with a shake of the head as though asking for silence, he dismounted, threw his wheel into the tall grass, and running around the car, lay down along the running board. So rapidly had he acted

that no one had had time to speak, and immediately another bicyclist trundled through the gate. This time it was a ruddy-faced, middle-aged man with a couple of books strapped over his shoulder, a butterfly net across his chest, and a tin box rattling on his hip. He rode like a man in a hurry, gave one uninterested glance at the occupants of the auto, and rattled on, gazing earnestly down the dusty road.

The boy at once sat up.

"Thanks!" he said in a pleasant voice, and with very little accent. "That was a close shave. If I had had to catch another butterfly today I should have exploded. He will ride ten miles or so looking for me!" He chuckled wickedly.

"What do *you* have to learn about butterflies for? You are no girl!" said Hank scornfully.

"That's what *I* say," said the boy, smiling cheerfully at Lawrence. "They don't stick you with that sort of stuff in England. My people sent me over there to school for awhile, and it was great. Are you English?" he asked Lawrence.

"American," answered Lawrence.

"Better yet!" said the boy. "Not that England isn't all right, but they say America is so big and so roomy and a fellow can do as he pleases."

"Not much he can't," said Hank bitterly. "I never seen anything like it. It's 'don't step on the grass,' and 'don't pick the flowers,' and 'don't tease the animals,' and 'don't chip a piece of this here

house for a sooveneer.' Don't, don't, don't every way a feller turns!"

The boy looked surprised.

"Why should anyone *want* to tease the animals or chip pieces off the houses?" he asked.

"They don't," replied Hank. "At least they don't 'til some smart Aleck sticks up a sign and puts it into their heads. And then of course they gotter."

"Oh, well," said the boy, "there are lots of other things you can do that you can't do here."

"Not much, I bet," said Hank, but Bill interrupted.

"Don't be forever kickin' on your home town," he said. "It does rub me the wrong way. You are a regular Bullsheevikky."

"They ain't any more of them," said Hank triumphantly.

"What is your name?" asked the boy of Lawrence.

"Lawrence Petit," said Lawrence. "What is yours?"

"Modo," said the boy.

"Sounds like a girl," said Hank, "but I will say you don't look the part. I should say you look like a real honest-to-goodness feller."

"I am glad of that," said the boy simply. "Names don't mean much."

"Not sometimes," replied Hank. "I bet the young Prince in there don't answer to anything

simple as that Modo. I bet he has a name long as your arm, even just with his own folks."

"He means the one that's going to have the party," explained Bill.

"Oh, the crown prince!" said the boy, rumpling up his black hair. "He has a lot of names. Seven, I think."

"Whee!" said Hank. "Think of that! Every time his mother calls him, calling like John-Henry-George-Washington-Christopher-Columbus-James."

The boy laughed until he cried. "I don't believe they use them all at once," he said. Then he turned to Lawrence. "If you are an American, you know all about football, don't you?" he said. "The boys here don't know how to play it, and I am crazy to start a team. The English game is not like the American at all, they say."

Lawrence hopped out of the car, eager to talk on his favorite subject, for next to flying he loved football. Together the boys wandered down the slope, and sitting at the foot of a tree with their knees drawn up, they chewed grass roots while they discussed the great American game. After awhile they returned to the car and sat on the running-board while Lawrence wrote his address for Modo, who was going to write to him for some books on the subject. Hank and Bill, smoking lazily in the car, leaned over with words of advice.

They had been sitting there only a few minutes when another bicyclist rolled through the small

gate. This time the rider was in the uniform of a house servant, impressive with silk stockings and much gold lace. He spied Modo, and with an abrupt motion stopped his wheel and dismounted with a low bow.

"Your Highness, Her Majesty desires your attendance," he remarked to the boy impressively, bowed again and, backing off a pace, mounted his wheel and went back through the gate.

"Mother is all fussed up about this party," said Modo smiling. "And I suppose she wants to drill me in something. It is an awful nuisance." He looked at Hank and laughed. "I hope you don't mind," he said. "And they *don't* call me all seven names every time!" He waved a merry good-bye to the petrified airmen, shook hands with Lawrence, and promising to write soon, ran off, trundling his wheel.

"Somebody pinch me!" begged Hank, after a long pause. "*Your Highness* and me joshing him about his name, and all that!"

"A real boy!" ejaculated Bill.

"Yes, sir! Nuthin' but a *real boy!* Kind you see anywhere. And the crown prince! 'Mother is all fussed up' says he. Well, I am in mother's class on that! Say, he's dropped his pencil! I'm goin' to keep it. Gosh, this will make talk back home. 'One morning in Morania,' says I, 'me and Modo was talkin'.' 'Modo who?' says somebody, and I says, 'Why, you nut, don't you study hist'ry?

I mean His Highness the Crown Prince Modo of Morania!' And then I'll flash this pencil with a crown printed on the side of it. Wow!"

"Well, thank goodness we come!" said Bill. "Now you have something to gas about besides accidents and murders."

"You bet!" said Hank, and fell silent.

A moment later Modo came hurrying through the gate on his wheel. He dismounted, and flashing his bright and friendly smile mounted the running-board of the car.

"They are going to make a big fuss over my birthday," he said, "and some medals have been struck off to commemorate it. I thought you might each like one since you won't be here to the party. I am to give them out and pin them on myself." He fastened glittering medals on Lawrence, Bill and Hank as he spoke.

"There!" he said. "Don't forget me! Good-bye! It was great fun to be just a boy. Good-bye, Lawrence! Don't you forget to write and send me all the football news!"

He mounted his wheel and disappeared for the last time.

"And they says," murmured Hank, "they says 'Whatcher got on?' and I says, 'Where?' and they says, 'Why, that breas'pin!' and I says, 'Oh, a little decoration the Crown Prince of Morania gimme.' Big stuff, eh?" he prodded Bill gaily.

"These are beauties all the same," said Lawrence, "and here comes Mr. Ridgeway."

Talking in "close formation," as you might say, they displayed their medals and recounted their incident. Mr. Ridgeway also had a medal, and another decoration as well: a broad purple ribbon with a gold Greek Cross blazing with jewels. It was to signify that he had been made a member of the Order of the Crown. "For bringing back the jewels," he explained, laughing.

"When do we start home, Mr. Ridgeway?" asked Hank.

"Do you men want to look around the city for an hour or so?"

"I don't," said Hank. "I seen it from above, and there's no use wasting time."

"All right then; we will go back to the dirigible and start for our little baby republic. I should have made that my first errand, but this saves a few hundred miles, and I want to get to England as soon as I can."

As they rolled along toward the aviation field, Mr. Ridgeway outlined their plans.

He was anxious for a rest. After visiting the President of the new republic, he wanted Hank and Bill to drop Lawrence and himself down at the country house where Mrs. Ridgeway was staying. There they would stop until the dirigible was in order. Then one of them could report and Mr.

Ridgeway would motor over to the plain and look it over. They could then divide, and take the ships back to the United States.

"You may like to stay and return with Mrs. Ridgeway and myself," he said, turning to Lawrence.

The boy shook his head.

"I must go back, sir. I have something very important to do."

"You won't think so after you get acquainted with Mrs. Ridgeway," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Everyone is crazy over her, and she likes boys."

"I would like to stay," said Lawrence, "but it seems as if the business just couldn't wait a day."

"Well, we will talk it over later," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Perhaps I can help you. At all events, I will take you with me until the dirigible is mended. It will not be a long job. I hope O'Brien is feeling well. He must have been stiff and sore after that bout. We will have a lot to tell Mrs. Ridgeway."

They got the dirigible up safely and sailed off in the direction of the young republic, Bill declaring that hobnobbing with royalty had utterly ruined Hank as a machinist.

Four hours later they had reached their destination and were once more waiting for Mr. Ridgeway to get through the complicated ceremonies of meeting the heads of the new nation. Messengers raced here and there, telephones buzzed, lights flashed up in the state hall, and finally while Lawrence and

the others dozed in the lobby of the nearest hotel, the President and Cabinet indicated their readiness to receive the messenger from the big republic across the sea.

An hour later, when Mr. Ridgeway saw that the meeting was to be a long one, apparently to impress him, he telephoned to the patient waiters to have supper. They obeyed with great cheer and then settled themselves for another long wait.

When Mr. Ridgeway finally appeared it was so late and his bruised head was throbbing so that Lawrence suggested spending the night there.

Hank and Bill went back to the dirigible, and Mr. Ridgeway secured a large room with twin beds for himself and Lawrence. It was a comfortable novelty to find themselves between clean sheets again, and they were almost too comfortable to go to sleep immediately.

So they talked awhile, of the fight, and Van Arsdale, and the jewels, and the journey, and its pleasant ending, and a hundred times Lawrence started to tell Mr. Ridgeway about himself and stopped. More and more the feeling had come that perhaps there was nothing in it after all, and in that case he decided that no one should ever guess what high hopes had filled him, or what black disappointment had followed.

CHAPTER XV

Noon the next day found them over England, searching out one of the aviation fields that had been arranged at frequent intervals since the end of the Great War.

Airships of all sorts were so commonly used that this was a necessity. All Country Clubs had them, as well as extra hangars for visitors. At most fields there were instructors, most of them American, just as golf instructors are almost always Scotch. And the finest fields had wide exercise fields where beginners and children could potter around in safety.

At one side of the aviation fields ran a low line of sheds for motors where men driving out from the city could lock and leave the cars they had come in while they were aloft in the airplanes or dirigibles, though dirigibles were but little used, on account of their size and expense. Even the small racing dirigibles like Mr. Ridgeway's pair, and the one Van Arsdale had owned, were not common. It was like approaching in a state chariot, Lawrence found, and he commenced to understand that the use of the big balloon had been partly to impress the Moranians and the republic.

At least twenty slim, graceful planes were flying

here and there as they commenced to descend to the field, and quite a flock of them, bright and saucy, flitted round them as they went down. In the distance, they could see brightly clad little figures trotting around the golf course, and nearer, on the tennis courts, groups of what looked like dancing dolls hopped and pranced over the smooth surfaces.

"Makes me homesick to see all those planes," said Bill.

"Awful poor pilots, most of 'em!" Hank replied, watching a monoplane go jerking around just above the ground. "Look at that! Oh, lordy! Well, he did miss the Club House, didn't he? But I bet the mortar is peeling out from them stones from fright. Must be a kid at the wheel. No, by gummy, see the old duck steerin'?"

And as the plane careened near them, Hank leaned out and flung hot words of scorn and advice after the uncertain holder of the wheel.

"Poor old dear!" said Hank. "Don't you suppose he ain't got no folks? He ought to have some grandchildren or somebody that loves him, that ought to keep him with his feet on the ground where he belongs. There he goes again! See the leaves he clipped out of that oak tree. Well, I can't look! I just can't watch and see him destroyed."

"He's going down," said Bill, looking after the careening plane. "He does lay a queer course."

"Queer course!" exclaimed Bill. "If it was so you could run a trail behind him, it would look like

a ball of rickrack braid after a kitten had played with it."

After the dirigible had been secured, the party started over to the Club House where Mr. Ridgeway hoped to get a motor. Bill and Hank sauntered along in the rear.

"There's that precious old Methuselah that was reelin' around in the plane," said Hank suddenly. "I got a mind to go tell him what I think."

"Don't butt in!" advised Bill. "Remember what you just went through back there in Morania. That old bird may be the Emperor of Switzerland for all *you* know!"

Hank seized a passing caddie. "Hey, kid!" he ordered, "who is that old chunk of trouble amblin' along there in the giddy plaids?"

The caddie looked.

"Over there?" he asked. "With the eyeglass?"

"The same!" said Hank. "Now whose grandpappy is he?"

"That's his grace the Duke of Mountjoy and Pewanit," said the boy glibly, "and he is waving to the Prime Minister."

"Thanks!" said Hank. He passed on, and after a moment lifted up his voice in a sort of chant.

"And the folks will say, 'What did you do with yourself when you wasn't flyin'?' and I will say, 'Oh, we found a pretty decent Club. Old Dook Mountjoy-and-Thinggummy belongs. Used to meet him there with the Prime Minister.'"

Bill glared. "Honest; I tell you one thing right now. You can commence to talk straight United States *NOW* or we go back in separate dirigibles."

"Aw, I'm just practicin'," Hank replied.

"Not on *me*," said Bill. "Hurry up now, can't you see Mr. Ridgeway beckonin' or can't you see anybody any more but dooks?"

"I can see enough to guess it's dinner time," Hank returned cheerfully, and they hurried up to find that that was the very item Mr. Ridgeway wanted to discuss with them.

Mr. Ridgeway seemed to be at home wherever his airship happened to light, and signing the visitors' book, he took his party into the dining-room, where, in a secluded corner, they disposed of a fine luncheon and watched the people come and go.

Mr. Ridgeway found a friend who was going right down into the country where Mrs. Ridgeway was staying and he offered to take him and Lawrence down with him.

So here they parted, and for a long, long time Lawrence was to see no more of the two clever, honest fellows who had gone through such dangerous deeds with them. Lawrence watched them go off together toward the aviation field where the dirigible was waiting.

"A good pair," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Honest, faithful, and the best airmen that one could ask. Almost as good as you, Lawrence boy. And now we will wait for our friend to take us to Gray

Towers where we will find Mrs. Ridgeway. We will surprise her. She does not expect us so soon."

The road to Gray Towers took them through the loveliest part of lovely England. To Lawrence, it seemed a wonderful experience to bowl along between trim hedges and high walls, then through wonderful forest preserves and clean toy villages.

Their host, Mr. Alden, lived on the estate next to Gray Towers, and gladly took them to the door of the old castle, although Mr. Ridgeway assured him that they could easily walk the short cut of two miles from the great gates to the door. Lawrence would have been glad of the walk when he got glimpses of the deer between the trees, and when dozens of rabbits flashed across the road before them. Lawrence looked so pleased and happy that Mr. Ridgeway put his arm about his shoulders, and asked, "Now aren't you glad you came?"

"Are we going to stay here in these woods?" asked Lawrence.

"Right here!" Mr. Ridgeway assured him. "The place belongs to my sister's husband. She married an Englishman, Lord Gray of Gray Towers and there," he added, "are the Towers themselves."

A sort of awkwardness filled Lawrence. "I don't belong among such people," he muttered, but Mr. Ridgeway either did not hear or did not wish to reply.

They drew up at the broad steps, where carved lions stood on great square blocks of stone.

The friend, eager to get home, drove on as a lady came out of the door and ran down the steps to meet them.

She wore a kilted walking skirt and sweater, and the sun glinted on her fair hair in which the white showed plainly.

"Hello, Sis!" called Mr. Ridgeway, hurrying to greet her. "How are you all, and where is that wife of mine?"

"It is a wonder you wouldn't give us more warning of your arrival," said the lady. "That wife of yours has been in London for several days, and she can't possibly return before tomorrow morning. Your wire did not come in time. I have telephoned her, however, and she will call you later."

She turned inquiringly to Lawrence, and Mr. Ridgeway introduced him.

"I am glad you came," said Lady Gray cordially. "I have two boys about your age. You will be great friends, especially as they are both anxious to fly."

She studied him thoughtfully.

"Whom does he remind you of, Hamilton?"

"No one that I can think of," said Mr. Ridgeway.

The lady sighed. "Come in!" she said.

The two boys were nice chaps and asked a million questions which Lawrence was well able to answer. When he told them that he was going back to the

United States probably the next day, they refused to consider it at all.

But now that all the danger was over, and the thrills of the journey, Lawrence felt himself once more drowned in loneliness. All the cheery affection and the atmosphere of home oppressed him to the very soul. Even if his own people were poor, no matter how humble they were, Lawrence wanted them with a longing that was almost agony. He *had* to go back! He *had* to know!

So he stood firm, although Mr. Ridgeway assured the boys that he was going to have a good talk with Lawrence when they went to bed, and he was willing to bet that he could coax him to stay.

"Go to bed early then!" cried the boys.

It was early when they said good-night, and went up the wide stairs. Mr. Ridgeway was still suffering with his head and needed rest. As they prepared for the night, he said:

"Well, Lawrence, how do you like them all?"

"They are fine!" said Lawrence heartily. "I think Lady Gray is beautiful."

"Not so beautiful as Mrs. Ridgeway," replied that lady's husband. "You don't get her look in a picture. Her beauty is her changing expression and her color. The painting at home is magnificent, but it does not give you the right idea of her. When she is happy she looks like a girl. I have an awful crush on her, Lawrence." He laughed, and fumbled in his pocket. "This is the picture I like

best," he said, taking out a pocket case. "It was taken years ago, for my birthday, and she has never had another that pleased me so well. It is just like her." He pulled the reading lamp over and laid the open case down on the table under the strong light.

Lawrence looked.

For a moment he saw the picture clearly, and then as he stared it swam off in a sort of mist. He kept his eyes on it and it came back, and gazed gently, radiantly up at him. But he could not speak. He felt his knees giving, his heart hammering. It couldn't be true! Something was wrong! With fingers that fumbled and shook, he felt for his own case, found it, dropped it, recovered it, and at last managed to open it and place it beside the other.

Then he groaned.

"Eh?" said Mr. Ridgeway, coming back from the dresser. "Lovely, isn't it?" He looked past Lawrence's bowed head, at the two pictures, and with a great cry seized them.

"Lawrence . . . boy . . . merciful heavens . . . where did you get this . . . explain!" came bursting from his lips.

Lawrence gently took his picture, felt under the photograph, and offered the two pieces of paper — the scrap written over with his name and the torn bit of newspaper.

"I was stolen," he said, his lips almost too dry

and trembling for speech. "My brother was drowned. I did not know until just before we set out. I have always had these. A woman said to keep them. She said they would lead me to my people."

So far Mr. Ridgeway had listened. Then with a great and terrible cry, the cry of a strong man who has been too brave to voice his agony and has borne it for years, he took Lawrence to his heart.

The tears of men and the embraces of men should be sacred, and it was with a feeling that his soul had been washed clean of everything but thankfulness and love that Lawrence found himself sitting beside his father later when they were composed enough to talk. Mr. Ridgeway's arm about his son's shoulder still trembled, and their hands were still clasped as though they were afraid of losing each other. Again and again they told each other of the past, again and again Mr. Ridgeway wondered if his wife would ever be able to stand the shock of joy.

It was late when they heard the light footfall of Lady Gray as she passed down the corridor to her room.

"Let us tell her," said Mr. Ridgeway. "She will know what to do."

He went to the door, and asked her to call her husband and come in.

Their joy was as great as it could be when they really accepted the wonderful fact. It seemed as

though no one *could* go to sleep. Finally toward morning they settled down, but Mr. Ridgeway could not close his eyes, and Lawrence, although he obediently shut his, lay awake listening to his father's uneasy breathing as he stared through the dawn at the beloved son that had been given back to him.

Lady Gray had warned them all not to tell the boys, as they might let the news slip before her sister was prepared for it. So breakfast was made possible by their appeals to Lawrence to stay on and help them build a plane.

As the time for Mrs. Ridgeway's return approached, Lawrence grew almost unbearably nervous. What if she should not like him? He brushed and rebrushed his hair. He had asked Mr. Ridgeway to tell her all before they met. Lawrence wanted his first sight of that pictured face to be the face of his mother, not a stranger who would give him a friendly hand to shake.

So he ran, actually *ran* for refuge to his room when he heard the motor come up the winding drive. Gay voices and greetings floated up to his open window, but he could not look out.

Downstairs his father would now be taking his wife into the dim library. He would draw her over to the divan and seat her in the circle of his arm. Just as they had planned, he would tell her carefully and tenderly that her son, her own son was found at last, that not both little fellows had been doomed to the flood.

"But what if she doesn't like me? What if she doesn't *want* me?" Lawrence asked himself over and over.

Time dragged on; it seemed the day had gone past, yet his watch had counted off but half an hour. He could not stand it! He took out the case and, laying the picture on the table, gazed down into its tender eyes. Then, unable to bear it, he sank to his knees and put his face against the picture.

"Mother, what if you do not love me?" he asked, his heart starving.

As if in answer, the door opened. Springing to his feet, Lawrence wheeled.

She stood in the doorway, the picture itself, his Pretty; his mother!

Their eyes met and held. She did not speak. She gave a little crooning cry. Her arms were wide and waiting.

And Lawrence went home.

THE END